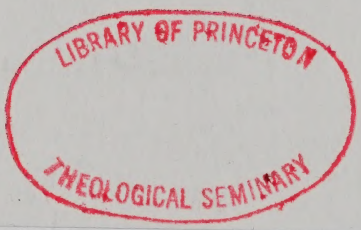

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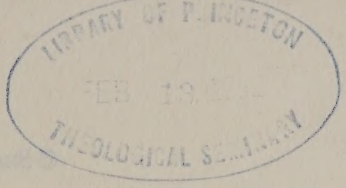

THE CONSCIENCE OF ISRAEL

Pre-exilic Prophets and Prophecy

by BRUCE VAWTER, C.M.

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In Memory of
My Father and Mother

Foreword

This book was already completely written before the publication of the new Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) translation of the Prophets. Now that the Catholic reader has available in this version the whole of the prophetic literature in readable modern English, I hope that he will be encouraged by this effort of mine not to rest content with the few prophetic passages I have translated for him, but will want the rewarding experience of a fuller, firsthand knowledge of the prophets and their writings.

The translations that I have given in this book are not as literary as those of the CCD or of other modern versions of the Bible intended for general reading. In order to bring out the prophetic vocabulary and style I have translated as literally as possible, sometimes with the sacrifice of English idiom. With the same intention of permitting the prophets to speak as Hebrews I have simply transcribed Israel's proper name for its God, Yahweh or Yahweh Sebaoth, rather than make the customary paraphrases of LORD and LORD of Hosts.

The translation of other biblical passages than the prophetic is also usually my own. However, the translation of Heb 1, 1 that more or less forms the theme of the very last section of this book appears in the happy phrasing of the late Father Joseph L. Lilly, C.M., taken from the Kleist-Lilly version of the New Testament (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1954).

No critical notes have been given for any of the translations.

These would be tedious and useless for the ordinary reader and superfluous for anyone acquainted with the original text, who will readily recognize the adoption of emendations proposed by commentators and textual critics.

Footnotes have been held to an irreducible minimum. In general, they have been used only to identify direct citations of other authors and to convey such incidental items of information as seemed required for clarity.

In transcribing biblical names into English I have joined the growing number of Catholic writers and editors who nowadays use the spellings customarily found in our dictionaries, encyclopedias, and our general literature as a whole. Whatever the origin of these spellings, it is no longer correct to regard them as "Protestant" so much as they are standard English. They are now part of our language, and it lessens confusion to adapt ourselves to the fact, just as a Protestant writer in, say, French must adapt himself to the "Catholic" spellings that are standard in that language.

In the list of biblical books that follows, however, I have put in parentheses the Vulgate spellings with which Catholics have been more familiar in the past, and which have been retained by the CCD version. At the same time, the reader will find that in its Prophets volume the CCD itself has somewhat modified some of these "traditional" spellings.

I am grateful to Mr. Kenneth Carlson for preparing the Index to this book. The two maps I owe to the skill and taste of Mr. Frank Jacobucci.

Contents

INTRODUCTION: PROPHECY IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS 1

PART ONE: PROPHECY AND THE PROPHETS

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROPHET IN ISRAEL

1. The Prophetic Conscience 13
2. The Prophet's Status 18
3. "True" and "False" Prophets 21

CHAPTER TWO: THE PROPHET IN THE NEAR EAST

1. The Mother Soil 29
2. Evolution of the *nabi* 34
3. The Dimensions of Prophecy 38

CHAPTER THREE: THE VISION OF THE PROPHET

1. The Vision Received 44
2. The Vision Communicated 48
3. The Limits of Vision 52

PART TWO: THE PROPHETS OF THE EIGHTH CENTURY

Chapter Four: AMOS OF TEKOA

1. The Time of the Prophet 62
2. The Prophet Taken From Judah 75
3. Israel and the Nations 77
4. The Varieties of Injustice 86
5. The Nature of Religion 91
6. Election and Universalism 92

Chapter Five: HOSEA BEN BEERI

1. Hosea in His Age 99
2. Gomer and Israel 105
3. Ignorance of God 114
4. The Covenant 121
5. Hosea the Theologian 127

Chapter Six: MICAH OF MORESHETH

1. The Man of the Book 131
2. The Rise of Judahite Capitalism 133
3. Devourers of the Land 140
4. What Yahweh Requires 148
5. Yahweh the Savior 152

Chapter Seven: ISAIAH BEN AMOZ

1. The Isaian Age 164
2. The Corruption of Judah 170
3. The Failure of the Kings 176
4. The Seeds of Evil 190
5. Justice and Holiness 195

PART THREE: THE PROPHETS OF THE SEVENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER EIGHT: THREE MINOR PROPHETS

1. Judah from Manasseh to Josiah 211
2. Nahum of Elkosh 219
3. Zephaniah ben Cushi 221
4. Habakkuk 225

CHAPTER NINE: JEREMIAH BEN HILKIAH

1. The Last Days of Judah 234
2. The Reluctant Prophet 240
3. Jeremiah and the Reform 245
4. Jeremiah and Jehoiakim 255
5. Jeremiah and Zedekiah 262
6. The New Covenant 271

CONCLUSION: THE ENDURANCE OF PROPHECY

1. The Prophetic Tradition 278
2. The Transcendence of Prophetism 285
3. Fragmentary and Varying Utterances 289

APPENDIX: KINGS AND PROPHETS IN APPROXIMATE RELATION 296

INDEX 301

THE PALESTINE OF THE PROPHETS (MAP) 306

THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST (MAP) 307

KEY TO THE BIBLICAL WORKS CITED IN THIS BOOK

Gn	Genesis	Ez	Ezekiel (Ezechiel)
Ex	Exodus	Dn	Daniel
Lv	Leviticus	Hos	Hosea (Osee)
Nm	Numbers	Am	Amos
Dt	Deuteronomy	Mi	Micah (Micheas)
Jos	Joshua (Josue)	Hb	Habakkuk (Habacuc)
Jgs	Judges	Zeph	Zephaniah (Sophonias)
Ru	Ruth	Zech	Zechariah (Zacharias)
1–2 Sm	1–2 Samuel (1–2 Kings)	1 Mc	1 Maccabees (1 Machabees)
1–2 Kgs	1–2 Kings (3–4 Kings)		
1–2 Ch	1–2 Chronicles (1–2 Paralipomena)		
Ezr	Ezra (Esdras)	Mt	Matthew
Jb	Job	Lk	Luke
Ps, Pss	Psalm, Psalms	Rom	Romans
		Eph	Ephesians
Prv	Proverbs	2 Tim	2 Timothy
Is	Isaiah (Isaias)	Heb	Hebrews
Jer	Jeremiah (Jeremias)	Ap	Apocalypse

INTRODUCTION

Prophecy in the Scheme of Things

Theology, like gold, is where you find it. There is some to be found in a novel that was popular a few years ago, *Something of Value* by Robert Ruark. I am not sure that Mr. Ruark would be especially pleased to hear his book called theological, but his choice of title shows that he had in mind the limited sense in which I understand theology here.

Something of Value maintained that in Kenya the Mau Mau rushed in to fill a vacuum created by the abrupt and unnatural arrest of a traditional culture whose customs had been worked out pragmatically over a period of centuries. When you take away a man's treasured possession—in this case, his historical identity, his corporate personality—it is courting disaster not to give him something of value to replace it. As Mr. Ruark explained it, the white man had uprooted the native from the tribal culture that had given meaning to his life, and had given him nothing meaningful in return. This was the tragic condition that erupted in Mau Mau. Mr. Ruark did not dwell on the even greater tragedy, a companion tragedy at any rate, that the white man as he portrayed him had precious little of his own to hold to, let alone anything of value to offer the native. In the end, the white man showed his own rootlessness by himself becoming Mau Mau.

A generation before, another observer wrote much more thoughtfully about this same Africa, foreseeing what was to come

from the secret societies that were even then at work among the natives. Both he and the black man knew what was wrong, as can be seen from what he quoted of an old chief of Bata:

> The whites have come here. They have brought commerce here. They have settled soldiers here. They have called in strangers. They have brought their boats full of merchandise. All that is well. But my children no longer believe in anything, my daughters are scattered everywhere, the ancients are no longer listened to. The whites have taken our beliefs from us and have given us nothing in their place. . . . Come among us, you, the missionaries. You will not give us back the customs of our fathers; but you will teach us yours. We will hear you; perhaps God wishes to make us still live.[1]

Some prodigiously ignorant things have been written and said about the influence of Christian missionaries on primitive peoples. Mr. Ruark himself has written some of them. The missionaries have been represented as mainly interested in getting bare native girls into Mother Hubbards and otherwise imposing the veneer of an alien civilization on savages who, if not precisely as noble as Rousseau had thought them, were better for their own ways than for those imported by the missionaries. Doubtless there have been naïve missionaries, Somerset Maugham missionaries, and missionaries who have changed what they should have left alone. But, in general, it has been the missionaries who showed genuine respect for native cultures; it is they who compiled grammars and dictionaries of their unwritten languages, who collected and tried to understand their folklore and religious beliefs. Having some convictions about their own culture, they were able to see what was good in the natives', and also what they had to offer them that was of better value. As Bishop Le Roy wrote:

[1] Most Rev. Alexander Le Roy, *The Religion of the Primitives*, trans. by Rev. Newton Thompson (New York: Macmillan, 1922), p. 172.

> The Catholic missions that are today found scattered throughout the African interior, receive children and young men belonging to the various tribes of the black continent and teach them, among other things, the text and the practice of the decalogue. It is found that, on the whole, the sons of savages and cannibals soon form a boarding-school as elevated certainly in morality, if not more so, as many European colleges. The transformation takes place in a few months. What was necessary for its accomplishment? Certainly not the complete reversal of these natures and the creation of thoroughly new consciences. All that is required was the removal of some errors, the rectification of certain prejudices, and on the common basis of universal morality found in every "soul of good will," the construction of Christian morality, which is admirably adapted to that foundation. . . .
>
> Do not raise the objection that these same children, when they are set down in a European environment, often become more deceitful, slothful, dishonest, and worthless than they were before. I admit it at once. . . . Among their tribes these children had a pagan morality. At the mission they adopted Christian morality. In contact with Europeans, where they now become "boys" for every kind of service, they have adopted the independent morality which, without support or sanction of any kind (except the club and the prison), becomes a deplorably lax morality. But who is to blame?[2]

However, I do not intend to discuss the influence of our civilization on that of primitives, but to suggest an analogy between the tragic results of this influence in modern times and the ancient history of Israel.

At least three notable times in its history, Israel's traditional culture was challenged from without by materially superior in-

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

fluences that provoked a basic reaction. On the last of these occasions the reaction was violence, pointless and uncharacteristic, as cruel and as primitive as that of the Kikuyu in Kenya, hurled against a Roman empire that had proved itself as stupid and unimaginative in colonial affairs as colonial powers have been in our own times. This was the reaction of a people that had long been divided between the uncritical assimilation of foreign ideals and the purblind repudiation of everything non-Jewish, twin symptoms of a decay of genuine national vigor. The Greco-Roman experiment, which made our civilization, seldom was other than a seed of corruption for the pre-Christian Judaism that it finally destroyed by force.

Some two centuries before, there had been another revolution, the result of much the same circumstances. It was less ruthlessly violent, more principled and closer to the national and religious traditions of the people, and more the product of desperation than of choice. But this movement, too, begun on high principle and fought for noble ends, soon degenerated into despotism and the acceptance of the very evils—in their worst expression—that it had pledged itself to destroy. History scarcely affords a better example of the betrayal of a revolution than in the Hasmonean successors of the Maccabees.

But in the times of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, from the ninth until the sixth century B.C., when the people of Israel were literally caught in the pincers formed by the great powers of the Near East whose hegemony was successively held by Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia, events went otherwise. Betrayal there was, it is true, of Israel's highest ideals, by king and by commoner alike. Betrayal at times was wholesale and almost total. There were both senseless resort to violence and sickening subservience to the one or other "protecting power" that dominated the little Palestinian world for the moment. Yet somehow the national and religious identity was preserved in the face of odds that by all natural accounting were insuperable. Somehow, when time and time again it appeared that Israel was done for spiritually and morally, it rose

from its own ruins to live again. Somehow, despite internal corruption and external oppression, it preserved its integrity and it survived. The great kingdoms of the Hittites, the Hurrian empire of Mitanni, Assyria and Babylon themselves, vanished from the earth as though they had never been; their kings and their languages were forgotten until archeologists came once more to trouble the recurrently troubled soil of the Near East. Only Israel remained. It remained and produced the Old Testament. Largely responsible for this was the institution we call prophetism.

The trouble with using an analogy is that it may get out of hand and lead to unwanted conclusions. The Israelites were not, in any legitimate sense of the word, a primitive people when they took their place among the kingdoms of the Near East. They were not Bantu savages but heirs of an ancient culture that had been fed by the two mainstreams of Near Eastern civilization, Egypt and Mesopotamia, from time immemorial. Still, the analogy is valid as far as it goes. What was most distinctive about Israel was its national-religious heritage, bred into its flesh and bone by the desert God who had given it its birth. Thence came its laws, thence its way of doing things, thence the unappealable verdict on a given line of action, that "such things are not done in Israel." It was this heritage that the prophets preserved through prosperity and defeat, victory and exile.

This significance of prophetism can often be clouded for Christians, who are habituated to reading the Old Testament in the light of the New. In the past there has been a tendency to think of the prophets only with an obsessing conviction that they had no function other than to make predictions of the Messiah. The tendency is already discernible in many of the early Church Fathers. Catholics have been especially prone to it, since the versions of the Old Testament they have read till fairly recent times have been mostly based on the Vulgate of St. Jerome, and Jerome very often strengthened the messianic sense—or, more properly the christological sense—of prophetic passages, or even saw a messianic sense where none had been intended.

Now in a very true meaning of the expression, the Old Testament is indeed a preparation for the New. There is truly a messianic teaching of the prophets, something that was frequently enough ignored by the prevailing biblical interpretation of the last century, which was led by its "historicism" to as erroneous a view of the prophets as had ever been in generations past. But for all that, we must not make Christians out of the prophets. We must distinguish between the fulfilment of prophecy and the prophet's limited understanding of what the fulfilment was to be, or in other words, between prophetic vision and the vision of the contemporary Israelite who was a prophet. The Old Testament is a preparation for the New, but it is not its anticipation.

What the prophets did they did as Israelites, for Israel. This includes their prediction of a fair future as well as their condemnation of an evil present; and, to be sure, there is more doom-prophecy than weal-prophecy in what they have to say, for they are more concerned with the present than with the future. Their vision, first and foremost, was of the here and now and of the emergent anon, not of a mysteriously remote eschatology. It had to be so. They were sent to warn of the speedy and inexorable judgment of a just God and to hold up the hope of regeneration in return for repentance. They were unspeculative men addressing an unspeculative people, whose knowledge of the meaning of life was almost wholly circumscribed by birth and death. Among all its neighbors of antiquity, Israel stands almost unique in its virtually total silence regarding the nature of the hereafter. In this perspective the prophetic preaching must also be seen. Like all good preaching, it was pragmatic to the needs of its audience and directed to realizable ends.

As believing Christians, we look on the prophets as those who pointed to Jesus Christ. We do so on no less authority than the New Testament itself. But we do this in the name of the unity of the Bible and of the one God who inspired both Old and New Testaments, who in doing so gave them this unity. The unity of the Bible is a New Testament revelation; it was not consciously

created by the hundreds of disparate human minds of as many different ages who produced the Old Testament. In pointing to Jesus Christ, the prophets were bearers of a greater message than they knew, or rather, they knew its greatness only imperfectly. It is proper for us to understand their message in all its fulness from our vantage point of having seen it fulfilled. But our understanding will be illusory if it is not truly an enlargement of the prophets', if it is not framed firmly and squarely within the vision that they saw. We simply must not imagine that they saw as clearly as we do. According to the Gospels, Jesus refused to permit even John the Baptist, in a sense the last and most immediate of the prophets, to be included within the kingdom of fulfilment (Mt 11,11; Lk 7,28); and it is clear that the Baptist had no full realization of the character of the Messiah to whom he had pointed (Mt 11,2–6; Lk 7,18–23).

If we are to understand correctly the prophets and what they said, therefore, there is no substitute for seeing them against the backdrop of the history in which they lived. We must see them for what they considered themselves to be and were, devoted Israelites, believers in the destiny of their people, looking for a regeneration of Israel that it might continue to be what Yahweh had planned for it. We have not yet taken in their words until we have reset them—to the extent that this is possible for us—in the concrete historical moment that provoked them into being. When their words remain obscure for us, as often as not this means that we have been unable to recreate this historical moment.

This treatment of the prophets is not to lessen their relevance to the New Testament, rather it is a necessary condition if they are to have any relevance at all. If our comprehension of the meaning of prophecy is broader than the prophets', it is nevertheless the comprehension of a meaning that was first theirs. If it was never theirs, we have no business thinking of it as prophecy. We must begin, therefore, with what the prophets themselves understood. The first and most necessary commentary on the New

Testament is the Old Testament, but an Old Testament critically and honestly interpreted.

In this way I have set out in the following pages to deal with the prophets, taking them in the role in which they were cast by God as his messengers to Israel. In such a study, it seems evident that the only proper outline must be the history of Israel itself.

Other considerations, however, impose a further limitation. The Babylonian exile into which Judah entered in the year 586 B.C. marks a turning point in the history, the religion, and the theology of the people of the Old Testament that is recognized by every student of the Bible. The identity of religion and nation that characterized Israel before the exile did not hold on the return with the re-establishment of the Jewish commonwealth after 537. Within these fifty years tremendous things occurred, and from the Babylonian exile was born the miracle of Judaism. This religion presided over a changed people with a changing attitude toward history and its own destiny and with a new appreciation of its laws and its relation to God and to the land of his promise.

Postexilic Judaism and the prophetic experience that led to it are a study in themselves, quite as important as the study of the pre-exilic prophets and incomprehensible without such a study, but a different study for all that. In this book I have made no attempt to anticipate a further study, and have confined myself to an attempt to understand the great pre-exilic prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.

This means that I have included the prophet Jeremiah, who lived to see the exile but whose viewpoint is altogether that of pre-exilic Israel. He looked beyond the exile, it is true, to the Israel of a new covenant, but it is unlikely that he would have wholly approved of the Jewish community that actually appeared on Palestine's soil in response to his prophecy of return. Jeremiah's vision of the new covenant was to have a better fulfilment only centuries later. Jeremiah's contemporary Ezekiel forms a problem all his own for anyone who would divide Israel's history into the pre- and the postexilic. In one way, Ezekiel brings pre-exilic proph-

ecy to a satisfying conclusion, harking back at the same time to some of the earliest characteristics of Israelitic prophetism. In other ways, however, he is what he has been called, not entirely inaccurately, the father of Judaism. At all events, his character is distinctive enough to put him outside ordinary categories. I have, consequently, left him out of this one.

A final word seems in order, in a book that proposes to crowd a great deal into a rather small space. More has been written about the prophets than about any other biblical figures; this is true, at least, as regards the Old Testament, and may be true of the New Testament as well. The prophets have impressed various men variously, and probably no one has made the mistake of feeling that he has written of them adequately in every respect. The present author confesses to his own special interests in the story of prophetism, which will be quite apparent in the course of this book. He is aware that much has been left unsaid to which other writers might have given priority. There seems to be no remedy for this. But there is nothing to prevent the reader from making his own study of the prophets, and, in fact, it is hoped that this book may move him to do so. Largely for this reason, brief textual notes on the prophetical books have been inserted to guide him.

PART ONE

Prophecy and the Prophets

THE PROPHET IN ISRAEL
THE PROPHET IN THE NEAR EAST
THE VISION OF THE PROPHET

CHAPTER ONE

The Prophet in Israel

1. THE PROPHETIC CONSCIENCE

In the Introduction I touched briefly on a misunderstanding of prophetism that prevailed a generation or so ago. It was part of a far wider misunderstanding of the past that was probably the inevitable outcome of nineteenth-century optimism, which tended to measure every human endeavor against itself as the realized ideal. Literary and historical critics at that time were accounting for the formation of the Bible fairly much in terms of the literary processes standard for contemporary Western Europeans, Hegelian methodology included. Biblical theology followed in the same path. It was demonstrable that the prophets had held to a highly spiritual and moral idea of religion. By that token, it must follow that the prophets shared the spiritual and moral religious idea of current biblical scholarship, which was mainly that of liberal Protestantism. That is to say, the prophets must have derived their inspiration from "normal" religious experience; they could only have viewed with suspicion anything suggesting mystical exaltation or group enthusiasm. They must have repudiated animal sacrifice as an earthy and crude attempt to serve the God who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. They must have restricted themselves to moral condemnations, for they could have had no

sympathy for popular aspirations of a bright future that took their rise from national, political, and ritual sources.

At its best, this feeling of kinship with the prophets on the part of the critics led to their thorough exploration of the truly spiritual character of prophetic teaching. Carl Heinrich Cornill, one of the best writers of the school, epitomized this discovery of prophetic significance:

> If Israel became in the matter of religion the chosen people of the whole world, it owes this to prophecy, which first clearly conceived the idea of a universal religion, and established it in all its foundations. . . . The whole history of humanity has produced nothing which can be compared in the remotest degree to the prophecy of Israel. Through prophecy Israel became the prophet of mankind. Let this never be overlooked nor forgotten: the costliest and noblest treasure that man possesses he owes to Israel and to Israelitic prophecy.[1]

If there is exaggeration here, it is of a harmless kind. Enthusiasm of this sort did at least recognize the unique and transcendent qualities of Israelitic prophecy.

Too often, however, it resulted in a Protestantization of the prophets. The prophets were thought of as earlier Luthers and Wesleys, resisting the crudities of an official sacramentalism, beckoning their people to the freedom of *fides nuda*. This attitude obviously affected biblical interpretation considerably.

Today only vestiges of it remain. These are enough to furnish the material for some lively debates among biblical scholars, but the trend is certainly now in an opposite direction. Most critics find it hard to understand how such views could ever have been maintained in such extreme forms, so compelling is the evidence

[1] *The Prophets of Israel* (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1895), pp. 178 f.

that connects the prophets with the traditional religion of Israel. It is, indeed, hard to understand how they could have been held of Isaiah, for example, who heard his call to prophecy amidst the smoke of sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple. But the temptation to clothe the prophets in one's ideals has always proved irresistible—witness the Renaissance demigods whom Michelangelo painted on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel.

Catholic scholars have had little or nothing to do with this debate about the prophets. Accustomed to a religion in which ritual and moral teaching each plays its part, and in which each is taken seriously, they were unable to see the issue at stake which to the Protestants was so important.

The peg on which the prophets' supposed hostility to ritual worship could be hung was their habitual denunciation of sacrifice as carried out in the shrines at Bethel, Gilgal, and Jerusalem itself. There is no doubt as to what the prophetic view of these sacrifices was, but it no more rejected the principle of sacrifice than did a medieval painter reject ecclesiastical authority when he put mitres on the heads of souls in hell.

When the prophets condemned anything, they did it in the round Semitic fashion that is impatient of distinctions and that is existential rather than essential. They were not concerned with the principle of sacrifice, but with an evil situation. Men were going through the motions of formally honoring God while their every daily action proved that they had none of the love of God that alone gives sacrifice a meaning. It was hypocrisy that the prophets condemned, not sacrifice. Formalism is the calculated risk of every organized religion. Those who most bitterly attack a religion's formalism, however, are not its enemies.

The prophets' harsh words against popular religion are just one aspect of their sweeping rejection of the whole society in which they lived. We have coined the word jeremiad after one of the greatest of the prophets, and Jeremiah—more properly, the Lamentations which were traditionally ascribed to him—is far from being the most condemnatory of the prophets. To the casual eye,

there is certainly more that is negative than positive in the prophetic writings. The positive is there, but it must be extracted from a rather thoroughgoing discontent with the institutions of contemporary Israelitic life. Biblical scholarship in the past, to its credit, did study and codify well what is positive in prophetic teaching, even though in the process it widened unduly the separation that existed between the prophets and other Israelites.

The prophets have been aptly called the conscience of Israel. To call them reformers, as some do, is perhaps to attribute too much system and program to a message that was essentially vital and personal. The prophets had nothing to do with proposing systematic reforms; they were addressed to the far more radical task of touching men's hearts. They were no revolutionaries with a planned utopia. Why they appear so negative is that they had no future in mind that was not already included in the promises given Israel by its God. They had no new departures to suggest, only a return to the spirit which Yahweh had breathed into Israel in its creation, inherent in its authentic traditions and national character.

This national character had been largely lost in the Israel of prophetic times, for reasons which we shall see below. However, it is doubtful that in their efforts to evoke a response in the hearts of their countrymen the prophets were quite as unsuccessful as their own words might lead us to believe. That they speak of their failures more often than of their successes is again part of the Semitic pattern. What is certain is that our very possession of the prophetic books supposes those who were sympathetic to the prophetic cause, who wrote down the prophets' oral discourses, preserved and edited the written texts, and consigned them to posterity. Moreover, these prophetic texts were not handed down as the curiosa of an exotic faction, but as the religious and national heritage of a people. If the prophetic word had not struck a sympathetic chord in the conscience of this people, we would not have it to read today.

The prophets could hardly have denounced moral lapses and demanded a change of heart if the standards to which they appealed

were not shared in some way by the people before whom they appeared. If they confidently foretold a coming judgment of Israel because of its violation of Yahweh's moral will, they were not making his will known for the first time. When they insisted on repentance, they were demanding that Israel do what it should have been doing all along. Their claim that Israel had not known Yahweh is a reproach, not a new revelation.

Of course, prophetic religion did differ from popular religion, in the same way that the religion of a Francis or a Bernard differs from that of the society which it contradicts and whose complacency it challenges. To this extent it is correct to think of a popular religion that was opposed to the prophetic. But the former was an aberration from the latter, taken as the norm. Blackstone knew his audience when he described a practice as "ungentlemanlike, and so illegal in our island." The prophets, too, knew to whom they spoke when they justified their moral teaching by appeal to Yahweh's revelation of himself in Israel's history.

It is, therefore, the rule nowadays rather than the exception to view the prophets as traditionalists rather than as innovators. This means that

> priest and prophet were both concerned with the business of ethical instruction. The complaint of the prophet is that the priest was shamefully neglecting this part of his duty, not that the ethical instruction which he himself gave was quite different from what the priests were wont to give when they did fulfil their function as teachers of morality. If we are to do justice to the facts, we are compelled to recognize—and here we must ally ourselves with those who refuse to set prophet and priest as fundamentally opposed to each other—that both functionaries were concerned, in so far as they were true to their calling, with inculcating a known morality. There is a difference between the priestly attitude even at its best and the prophetic attitude, but it will not do to exaggerate it. . . . It must be maintained emphatically that the basis of the ethi-

cal teaching of the prophets is to be found in part in a moral code which the priests ought to have been urging on Israel as the embodiment of the way of life befitting her as God's chosen people.[2]

Accordingly, we now hear less and less of "ethical monotheism" as the creation or discovery of the prophets of Israel. That the prophets were ethical monotheists is evident to anyone who reads them. It should be equally evident that they were heirs of a long tradition of ethical monotheism, which they themselves ascribe to Israel's earliest origins, to that mysterious encounter of God and man that we know as revelation. It was to defend and to further this revelation that the prophets spoke to Israel.

2. THE PROPHET'S STATUS

That the prophet has regained his rightful place in Israelitic life is due, among other efforts, to those of an influential modern school of Scandinavian scholars. This school, which includes some quite distinguished names in present-day biblical scholarship, has done much to refocus attention on the role of ritual in ancient Israel and on the part that prophetism had in a ritual religion. However, as is the habit of reactions, this one now shows signs of becoming a counterexaggeration in its own right. We are in the present danger of being asked to understand everything about the prophets in terms of cult religion, whereas the criticism of the last century wanted to explain everything in terms of their denial of it. In part, this new attitude derives from some real and supposed parallels between prophetism and the institutions of other Near Eastern people, of which we shall speak in the next chapter.

Now there seems to be no doubt whatever that some of those

[2] Norman W. Porteous, "The Basis of the Ethical Teaching of the Prophets," in H. H. Rowley, ed., *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), pp. 148 f.

whom the Old Testament calls prophets were either functionaries of the national religion or at least attached in some way to its sanctuaries. In 1 Sm 9,11–26, for example, the prophet Samuel is seen in close connection with the "high place," that is, the place of worship and sacrifice, of an unnamed city which is doubtless Ramah, Samuel's home. He blesses the sacrifice and presides over the sacrificial meal that is eaten there. In 1 Sm 19,18–24 the same Samuel appears as the leader of a band of ecstatic prophets at Ramah. Of this type of prophet, likewise mentioned in 1 Sm 10,5.10 in relation to the "high place" of another city, we shall say more later on. Instrumental music was used to induce ecstatic prophecy (1 Sm 10,5). According to 2 Kgs 3,15 the prophet Elisha made use of the same device, and he is pictured in the stories that concern him at the head of a prophetical group like Samuel's. The author of Chronicles, who lived when the prophets were no more, wrote a theological reinterpretation of the scriptural history of the books of Samuel and Kings, one of whose characteristics is to portray pre-exilic institutions in their postexilic equivalents. He constantly uses the verb "prophesy" to describe the function of the temple singers of his day, whom he evidently saw as the successors to a prophetic group attached to the temple in pre-exilic times; of the existence of this group we have other indications, as in Jer 26,7 and 35,4. Persistently the Scripture introduces us to prophets or prophetic bands at known sanctuaries, such as Shiloh (1 Kgs 14,1–2), Bethel (2 Kgs 2,3), and Gilgal (2 Kgs 4,38). The existence of the "cult prophet," therefore, can hardly be denied.

Furthermore, though the prophets whose words we read in the prophetical books usually say very little about their associates, it is plain that they were not entirely the isolated figures that a first reading might suggest. Even Amos, as individualistic a person as one might hope to meet in the history of prophetism, shows that he is conscious of standing in a long prophetic succession (2,11; 3,7); and the prophets to whom he refers were certainly like those we have just mentioned.

Yet all this does not justify our explaining the phenomenon of

prophetism as though there were nothing behind it but Israelite ritual. There is no real reason to believe that Amos was ever a cult official, or that his appearance in prophecy at the royal shrine of Bethel was for any purpose other than to secure an audience for his oracles. There is no real reason to think that when Isaiah received his call to prophecy in the Jerusalem temple he was there in any capacity other than of a worshipping Israelite. There were cult prophets just as there were prophets attached to the royal courts, who were responsible, perhaps, for the oracles that appear in the "royal" Psalms (2, 45, 110, etc.), but not every prophet was a cult prophet.

Those whom we consider first and foremost the prophets of Israel, whose words we have in the books that bear their names, found their credentials not in any official position they may have enjoyed, but in their direct call by God himself. To adapt another terminology to them, their status was not hierarchical but charismatic. For this reason they are anxious to give testimony to the circumstances of their call. Isaiah describes his with much symbolic detail in his sixth chapter, and records the alacrity with which he accepted the divine commission. In the first chapter of Jeremiah there is something very similar, though here it becomes quite clear that Jeremiah was no willing prophet. The equivalent of these visions is in the narrative of Hosea's first three chapters and in Amos' assertion that he was no prophet till Yahweh "took" him.

The meaning of these scenes we can best see when we take up the individual prophets. In these passages they are attempting to put into human language experiences that to a large extent escape the control of words. To imagine that the imagery they employ forms the substance of what they are trying to tell us is as foolish as to imagine that the *Spiritual Canticle* of St. John of the Cross is a poem about sheep, dovecotes, and apple trees. The prophet did emphatically want to convey his absolute and serene conviction that he had been chosen by Yahweh, that he was consequently set apart from any mere functionary. This conviction sustains the assurance with which he heads his oracles: "Thus says Yahweh."

The reader can discount this certainty of vocation only at the peril of misunderstanding the prophets completely.

3. "TRUE" AND "FALSE" PROPHETS

Thus we are brought to a consideration of the difference between prophet and prophet in Israel. This is necessary, for the prophets themselves time and again denounce "the prophets" (Is 28,7; Jer 23,25–28, etc.), and, by a paradox, they whom we think of first of all as *the* prophets of Israel seem to have accepted the title only with reluctance, if at all.

"I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son," says Amos in our English Bibles (7,14). Amos' actual words were, "No *nabi* I, nor son of *nabi*." The Semitic "son" is merely a device for particularizing a collective idea: a "son of man" is a human being and a "son of god" a divine being. A "son of *nabi*" would mean something like "member of the *nabi* class" or "member of a *nabi* guild." It is quite plain, therefore, that we need to know precisely what Amos understood by *nabi*, if we are not to be confused by his disclaiming to be a prophet.

The confusion is not in our translation "prophet," which is perfectly legitimate, but in the Bible's own ambiguous use of the word *nabi*. The author of 1 Sm 9,9 acknowledges this ambiguity when he writes: "Formerly in Israel this is what a man said when he went to consult God: 'Come, let us go to the seer'; for the one today called 'the *nabi*' was called formerly 'the seer.'" He is alerting his readers to a change in terminology from the times of Samuel and Saul, the period with which his history is concerned. *Nabi*, once restricted in its meaning, was now made to do duty for all sorts of "inspired men," including the seer (*roeh*) who for a small fee would help in some matter like the recovery of a lost animal, as in the case at hand.

This later, all-inclusive use of *nabi* is the rule in the Bible. Moses is styled *nabi* in a text like Dt 18,18; Abraham receives the title in Gn 20,7; Miriam, Moses' sister, is called "prophetess" (*nebiah*) in

Ex 15,20 (possibly for the same reason that the Chronicler made the liturgical singers of his day "prophesy"); Deborah in Jgs 4,4 ff. is likewise a "prophetess," though not in the older poetic form of the Deborah story in Jgs 5. There is doubtless a common denominator here, but it is a vague one.

In this fact we have one reason for the prophets' avoiding the term. It could mean too many things, including things they did not wish to assert of themselves. But there was an even better reason, which was the original restricted meaning of the word.

If we are to judge from what appear to be the older texts of the Bible, *nabi* was at first the name of the ecstatic, dervish type of prophet that we saw associated with Samuel and Elisha. These were the ancestors of the "professional" prophets whom we see attached to the court of the king of Israel in 1 Kgs 22, and who are associated with the professional priesthood by such texts as Is 28,7 and Jer 26,7. They were not necessarily "false" prophets, but for their oracles they depended on group ecstaticism rather than on a special charisma from Yahweh. We can gather from 1 Sm 10,9–13 that they did not stand on a very high rung of the social ladder: here the people express surprise that Saul, a son of the responsible citizen Kish, seemingly had joined one of these ecstatic groups. Likewise in 2 Kgs 9,11 the "son of *nabi*" sent by Elisha to anoint Jehu is called by Jehu's companions "this madman"—*meshugga*, a term also applied to this type of prophet in Hos 9,7 and Jer 29,26. Still, Jehu's companions readily accepted the prophet's word as that of God. The attitude seems to have been somewhat like that shown the lower clergy in anticlerical societies today: socially they are irrelevant, but their function is accepted and made use of.

Again, therefore, we can see why prophets like Amos avoided the title *nabi*. Not that they repudiated all the ecstatic prophets of Israel; they simply wanted to insist that they were something else.

When ecstatic prophecy began in Israel is uncertain. Later Israelitic tradition (Nm 11,24–30) put its origins in the Mosaic age, but it is doubtful that it had many representatives before the Is-

raelite settlement in Canaan, where it was already an institution among the Canaanites (1 Kgs 18,20 ff.). Probably in part it rose in reaction to the Canaanite variety, and probably in part it developed in the enthusiasm of Israel's holy wars. The ecstatics were particularly active, it seems, in the time of the Philistine wars, and Am 2,11 associates them with the Nazirites, who were originally consecrated warriors. We may find it curious that ecstatic seizure or trance could be a legitimate medium of prophecy in Yahwistic religion, since the phenomenon is by no means proper to Israel. But it is only to be expected that God will communicate with man in the ways that man himself can understand, by the means that he himself has at hand. The divine condescension has refused to scorn humbler processes than this, in which we must doubtless place the first utterances of Israelitic prophecy:

> The prophetic movement takes root in group-ecstaticism, i.e., in dances or other physical motions repeated so often by members of a group that they finally succumb to a kind of hypnotic suggestion, under the influence of which they may remain unconscious for hours. In this state the subconscious may be abnormally active, and persons of a certain psychological type may have visions and mystic experiences which thereafter control, or at least affect their entire life. This phenomenon is universal among mankind, being found among savages, in antiquity, and among the highest religions of today.[3]

However, after the heroes come the epigones. The prophetic energy concentrated in ecstaticism that swept through the tenth and ninth centuries had burnt itself out by the time that the great moral prophets of the eighth century made their appearance. The associations remained, but the spirit had largely departed, to be

[3] William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 2d ed. (Anchor Books, 1957), pp. 301 f.

replaced by a professional technique, a repetition of time-honored motions without much understanding why or to what purpose. From these prophetic associations the royal courts and the sanctuaries recruited their prophets, and among them were the "false" prophets whom our "true" prophets accuse of lying oracles and deceitful counsel.

It is frequently taken for granted that the false prophets were consciously false, wilful deceivers, charlatans, and pretenders who played on the easy confidence of a primitive people. They are depicted in this fashion by Canon E. W. Heaton in a generally fine little book that he has written on the prophets:

> Human beings have always been susceptible to communications represented as having been received in a state of ecstatic trance. Many bogus types of 'spiritualism' exploit our credulity even today, very much as the professional prophets of Israel (literally) 'cashed in' on the gullibility of their contemporaries in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. A scathing comment from Isaiah on the prophets who 'err in vision' through wine and strong drink suggests one possible source of their inspiration. . . . The canonical prophets are never found employing artificial stimuli and before the Exile usually avoid attributing their oracles to the 'spirit of God.' They prefer to use terms which are less ambiguous, like 'the hand of the LORD.'[4]

However, it is incorrect to conclude that the professional prophets were automatically false prophets or that there were no true prophets other than the canonical prophets of our biblical books. As I have already pointed out, the great prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries do not disown their ecstatic forebears, though they do insist that they are a new kind of prophet. It is unlikely that the false prophets were usually evil men rather than

[4] *The Old Testament Prophets* (Penguin Books, 1958), pp. 41 f.

simply deluded. The distinction between "false" and "true" prophets is really ours, not the prophets' own. In the famous encounter of the prophet Micaiah ben Imlah with the court prophets of the king of Israel under the leadership of Zedekiah ben Chenaanah, Micaiah does not charge Zedekiah with being a wilful deceiver, but says that Yahweh had put a lying spirit in his mouth (1 Kgs 22,19 ff.). Even the best of prophets could err, deceived by Yahweh (Jer 20,7; Ez 14,9). This is stark Semitic language, which saw the divine causality in all things univocally. We would put it differently, that God permitted the prophets to err for his own reasons. What is asserted in the one case, nevertheless, also should be in the other. The "false" prophets did not always intend to deceive, but they confused their own minds with Yahweh's, as Ezekiel complained (13,2 f.).

Prophecy was never so cut and dried that it escaped the realm of mystery. By their words and actions the prophets show their own irresistible conviction of speaking in the name of Yahweh, but they were not always able to transmit this conviction to others. There were times, certainly, when an honest man must have been in doubt as to which opposing prophet was truly voicing the word of God and which had deceived himself into the belief that he was voicing the word of God.

But, we are told, a prophet had after all only to predict a thing, and its coming to pass would prove his prophecy true. The ways of God, however, are rarely as simple as this. The prophet was not a magician who could turn prediction on and off at will; he spoke when prompted by the Spirit, not to demonstrate his own prowess. Prediction, while part of the prophetic message, figures in it only occasionally, and then generally in an obscure way. Fulfilment could be delayed or ambiguous, so that it might seem that the prophet had failed to make good his word. And of course it was always possible that a false prophet's predictions, through unhappy chance, could come true. While Dt 18,21 f. recognizes prediction as a limited criterion of true prophecy, therefore, Dt 13,2–6 insists on the limitation.

When Jeremiah confidently predicted that the deported king Jehoiachin would never return from the Babylonian captivity, he was matched prophecy for prophecy by Hananiah ben Azzur, a prophet from Gibeon, who predicted just the opposite. Jeremiah could only reply: "Amen! may Yahweh do this! May Yahweh fulfil the words you have prophesied. . . . But hear now what I say both to you and to all the people. The prophets who were before you and me in ancient times prophesied war, destruction, and pestilence to many lands and mighty kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as truly sent by Yahweh only when his prophetic word comes to pass" (28,6–9).

Jeremiah does not maintain simply that a prophecy of war must be true and a prophecy of peace false, for the prophets of the past to whom he appeals had predicted good things as well as bad. They had predicted evil to an evil generation, however, and what they had predicted had come true. Hananiah was prophesying his own hopes and feelings—Jeremiah's too, for who is against peace and prosperity? But the precedent of the past is on Jeremiah's side when he predicts evil to another evil generation. He puts the judgment on the conscience of his hearers. Is what Hananiah prophesies likely, from what they know of the justice of God?

If what Hananiah had prophesied should come to pass—*per impossibile*—then Yahweh would no longer be true to his own revelation of himself. Such is also the teaching of Dt 13,2–6, even more vigorously stated:

> If there arises in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of dreams who offers you a sign or wonder, even though this sign or wonder that he has spoken to you comes to pass, do not listen to the words of this prophet or dreamer of dreams when he says, "Let us follow other gods," whom you have not known, "and let us serve them." For Yahweh your God will be testing you to know whether you really love Yahweh your God with your whole heart and being. You shall follow Yahweh your God and him shall you fear, keeping his commandments

> and heeding his voice, serving him and holding to him alone. But that prophet or dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, for he has taught rebellion against Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt and delivered you from the house of slavery, to make you depart from the way in which Yahweh your God commanded you to walk.

Prophecy was inseparable from the religion of Israel that antedated it and brought it into being. In the last analysis, the criterion of true prophecy was its accord with known revelation. The touchstone of truth, therefore, has remained the same in the New Testament that it was in the Old; the words of 2 Tim 4,3 f. apply equally well to the two revelations. The prophets spoke to the conscience of Israel. The Israelite who had stopped his ears to conscience could abide no comminatory word of any prophet. To him the prophets could only be what Elijah was to Ahab, "troublers of Israel." For him there was the soothing syrup of false prophecy, which troubled no conscience and revealed a new Yahweh of only pleasant words, to whom justice and charity were irrelevancies. Only the Israelite who held to the faith of his fathers heard in the prophets the authentic ring of the voice of God. True Israelite and true prophet stood in the same tradition and understood each other.

> We see the false prophets expressing the egotistical hopes and aspirations of the group or the individual, a thing that has happened in practically every age among practically every people. It is not so with the prophets of judgment, whom we see united in struggle against their entire environment. They devote all that they have to the task of transmitting a message that is not only in sharpest opposition to national and popular hopes, but also to their own natural desires and original intentions. The direction and purpose of their aim and effort are inspired by the faith in God that lives in them. They are unconditionally committed to the accomplishment of Yahweh's

will in the world. The conceptual side of their faith, their *fides quae* related to the election of Israel and the demands of God contained in the covenant, was no innovation or private possession of the so-called literary prophets.[5]

The prophets were sent to the people Israel, but they expected to be heard only by the Israel of faith. For this Israel, they needed to work no signs. For the other Israel, signs were useless. "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead" (Lk 16,3).

[5] Ivar P. Seierstad, *Die Offenbarungserlebnisse der Propheten Amos, Jesaja und Jeremia* (Oslo: Dybwad, 1946), p. 17.

CHAPTER TWO

The Prophet in the Near East

1. THE MOTHER SOIL

The great canonical prophets of the Old Testament, while they knew very well that they had something new to offer the history of prophetism, did not disavow the sources from which they sprang. The associations of ecstatic prophets that had preceded them and that partly coexisted with them also contained those who were prophets in their fashion, which was not invariably a bad fashion. Even when the canonical prophets deplore the professional prophets as false prophets, it is with sadness for a wasted and perverted vocation, not as though they were all that was to be expected of an institution that had no right to be. In resetting the prophets in the mainstream of Israelitic religious tradition, modern study has vindicated the judgment uttered some years ago by one of the still fundamental writers on Old Testament prophecy:

> There is no discontinuity in the development of prophecy from the older *Nabi'ism* of the period from Samuel to Elisha, to the new type of prophecy inaugurated by Amos. Nabi'ism had its unprogressive and degenerate representatives between whom and the true prophets there was an irreconcilable antagonism; but as the medium of Yahweh's intercourse with His people it had embodied the same fundamental principle,

and served the same end, as the work of Amos and his successors.[1]

But to affirm this is to enunciate a problem, which has probably already occurred to the reader. As I brought out in the preceding chapter, the ecstatic prophetism of the time of the Philistine wars was no exclusive possession of Israel, but a phenomenon shared with other religions of antiquity and some modern ones. In what sense, then, and to what degree can we continue to regard Israelitic prophecy as something unique in human history? When an author of the last century wrote that nothing in the whole history of humanity can be compared with the prophecy of Israel, he meant only Amos and those who came after: these to him were Israelitic prophecy. Can we take prophetism as the prophets themselves took it, as an institution in which Amos appears midway rather than at the beginning, and still affirm its unique character?

I believe we can, and in this chapter I shall try to show why. To use an analogy of Walther Eichrodt, "The mother soil of the religion of Israel and of other oriental peoples was the same." From this it necessarily follows that in many if not most of its external forms the religion of Israel will parallel those of its neighbors. But in Israel "the form is fitted to the service of other ideas and aims, and is filled with a new content."[2]

It would be pointless to ignore this common mother soil, as some have tried to do in the thought that they were protecting the prophets' good name. Not only is it pointless, it also makes the prophets much more difficult to understand. In his encyclical letter *Divino afflante Spiritu* of 1943, the late Pope Pius XII expressly enjoined on Catholic interpreters the use of archeology and comparative ethnology to recapture the cultural milieu in which the ancient

[1] John Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion. Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* (Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 5.

[2] *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, rev. ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), vol. I, p. 196.

biblical authors lived and from which they derived their creative personalities. We must first know what a prophet was in his contemporary world if we are to understand the meaning of prophecy. It is a lesson that some good people learn only painfully if they learn it at all, that only by searching out all the facts and weighing them honestly do we further the cause of truth.

We have already spoken of the cult prophet in Israel, and we have seen that the professional prophet and the priest are sometimes named in the same breath (Is 28,7; Jer 5,31, etc.). In Mesopotamia, a cultural area whose influence on Israel was always profound, there was a similar association of priesthood and prophecy. One order of priests, called *baru*, was made up of diviners who augured with animal livers, determining from the color and conformations what was the will of their god. This type of augury must have become quite routine, for archeologists have found many clay models of livers written over with directions as to how the various parts were to be "read" and what the diviner was to look for. One of these inscribed clay models was unearthed recently at Hazor in northern Palestine, dating from pre-Israelitic times.

There is no evidence that the Israelites ever practised liver divination, but some forms of divining were known to them. The Bible often mentions, and without disapproval, the use of *urim* and *thummim* and the *ephod*. We do not know what these words mean exactly, for the objects they describe had doubtless been abandoned long before the biblical traditions about them were written down. As far as can be surmised from narratives like 1 Sm 14,36–42; 23,9–12, however, the *ephod* was an oracle box containing two differently marked counters or dice, the *urim* and *thummim*. Depending on the way the counters fell out, or were drawn out, yes-or-no answers could be obtained for simple questions. The device is usually associated with priests (Jgs 18,5; 20,18; 1 Sm 14,3; Dt 33,8), but 1 Sm 28,6 also names prophets as a source of similar oracles in the time of Saul.

This was surely a primitive way of consulting God, and it would obviously be altogether illegitimate for anyone to imitate the

method. The Bible divination practised by our ancestors and still not unknown today, not to mention divining with tea leaves, crystal balls, and bumps on the head, was and is superstition. It was the same in Israel. "Diviner," an honored title among the Gentiles, was a term of opprobrium for Israelites; the word is never used of a true prophet. Divination was strictly forbidden by the law (Lv 19,26; Dt 18,10, etc.). *Urim* and *thummim*, therefore, were clearly an exception to the general rule that separated Israel from its neighbors rather than joined it with them.

The answers given David in 2 Sm 2,1 were probably by *urim* and *thummim* of the prophet Gad or the priest Abiathar. Probably the method differed little from that of the diviners who revealed the will of the god of Moab to the Moabite king Mesha (cf. 2 Kgs 3,4 ff.), which he recorded on a ninth-century stone memorial now in the Louvre Museum: "Chemosh said to me, 'Go take Nebo from Israel.' . . . Chemosh said to me, 'Go down, fight against Hauronen.' " It would be quite superficial, however, on the basis of this isolated practice to equate Israelitic prophetism with the "prophets" of the Gentiles, who were nothing if not diviners. For this ancient and somewhat naïve consultation of Yahweh there was toleration, but beyond this point toleration did not extend. The practice dropped out of use as religious sensitivity increased, and we never hear of divination in connection with the classical prophets of Israel.

Another order of Babylonian priest-prophets, the *mahhu*, were ecstatic seers. Together with the *baru*, they apparently represent a common pattern in the ancient Near East. "Baal of the heavens spoke to me through seers and through diviners," runs the inscription of Zakir, a Syrian king of the eighth century B.C.[3]

The role of the ecstatic prophet in the history of Israelitic proph-

[3] Here and throughout this book, English translations of the ancient non-Israelitic records to which reference is made can be found in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by James B. Pritchard (2d ed., Princeton University Press, 1955) and *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, edited by Isaac Mendelsohn (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955).

etism we have already noted. The roots of ecstaticism must be very deep in the ancient Near East. Its existence in Phoenicia in the eleventh century B.C. is recorded by a certain Wen-Amon, an Egyptian on a commercial mission to Byblos. Wen-Amon's story, incidentally, is an interesting one in its own right, with some wry comments that often sound as though they might have been written just a few days ago. His experience with the lad "seized by the god" was simply a detail in a series of major and minor damnabilities he had to endure as representative of a former colonial power from some rather churlish natives now painfully conscious of their independence.

The Israelite prophet is more obviously caught up in a pattern of Near Eastern ecstaticism than of divination. To this day some of the phenomena prevail among the Arab peoples. The Arabian prophet called *kahin* (the Hebrew word for priest is *kohen*) is thought to possess, or be possessed by, a *jinn* or spirit—an idea analogous to the Bible's frequent reference to the prophet as a "man of the spirit," or one on whom God's spirit has descended. While the classical prophets from Amos on, with perhaps the exception of Ezekiel, appear to have outgrown ecstaticism, modern observers have accounts of Arabian prophecy that read very much like some of the oracles of Amos or Jeremiah.

Modern study of what is now called extrasensory perception or telepathy—vulgarly, mind reading—makes it harder for us to classify all this sort of thing as humbug. It also makes it possible for us to understand how authentic prophetical experiences in Israel can find parallels among other peoples of inferior or even degraded religions. There are, we now realize, natural forces which we have not yet precisely defined, which account for clairvoyance or second sight, a thing that has been verified among all sorts of people in every age of mankind. This is not to say that every sideshow performer actually possesses this gift or is making use of it; it is simply to say that the gift exists. And it is only reasonable that God should have made use of such gifts in calling up prophets from among his people, making them the vehicle of his revelation.

The ecstatic, the clairvoyant, the seer, the diviner—all these grew in the same mother soil with Israelitic prophetism. This is the genus of *nabi*. In it true and false prophet, Israelite and Gentile prophet, came together as one. All were "inspired men."

Once again and finally, we can see why the canonical prophets are reluctant to be known only as *nabi*. For, whatever the occasional resemblances, their prophecy was something more than any or all of these others together. They had a conviction of God's immediacy that transcended all these other experiences, and they had a message to deliver more important than that communicated to any *nabi* before them. Common culture, cognate languages, and shared religious ideas could hardly fail to produce analogous institutions among the Near Eastern neighbors. Yet there was that in Israel that separated its prophetism from any previously seen on this earth.

2. EVOLUTION OF THE *nabi*

The original meaning of the word *nabi* that we have been using remains the subject of debate. It looks like a passive form in Hebrew, but it is not agreed what it is a passive of. Some scholars derive it from a verb meaning "to groan," and think that it arose from the incoherent or at least disjointed utterances of the ecstatic. This is not impossible; there is a Hebrew word for "prophesy" which means literally "to spit," and there can hardly be any doubt that this comes from association with the effect of ecstatic seizure.

Others relate the word to a verb "to speak": one "made to speak" would be, actually, "the speaker." And still others think that it is not a native Hebrew word at all, but has been borrowed from Mesopotamia, where it meant (though in a different sense) "one who is sent."

Whatever the origin, it is use that counts, and we have seen that in the vocabulary of the Old Testament it has a broad acceptation, most familiar to us in its application to the canonical prophets. It is this application, not necessarily the original sense of the word, that

the Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament, done sometime in the second century B.C., translated *prophetes*, that is, "one who speaks for another." The Septuagint deliberately avoided the term *mantis*, the classical Greek for an ecstatic prophet possessed of a divining spirit, one in the state of *enthousiasmos* ("possessed by a god") or *ekstasis* ("outside oneself"); *mantis* the Septuagint reserved to translate "diviner," which we have seen is never used in the Old Testament to refer to a true prophet.

Through the Greek, therefore, we have inherited the term, prophet, that was expressly devised to signify the *nabi* in the best Israelite sense. Behind this evolution in terminology lay the real development in prophetism itself that had taken place in Israel.

That prophetism in Israel had become a peculiarly Israelitic entity, is made very obvious after the separation of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel in the ninth century B.C. This result, however, was already foreshadowed in the person of Samuel, for the Bible makes it clear that in him a new dimension was added to prophetism. "The word of Yahweh was rare in those days," before Samuel, "there was no frequent vision" (1 Sm 3,1). Samuel became Yahweh's instrument in the establishment of the monarchy; this is agreed both by the tradition that opposed the establishment (1 Sm 8,4 ff.) and by the one that favored it (1 Sm 9,15 ff.). The traditions likewise agree that Samuel saw the establishment to its conclusion in the repudiation of Saul and the confirmation of David (even though 1 Sm 16,1–13 may be a later expansion of the original tradition). In his words and deeds Samuel is represented at one with the prophets of our prophetical books. His *apologia pro vita sua* in 1 Sm 12,3 is a mosaic of the speech of Amos, Micah, and Hosea. Though this may well be the composition of a later writer attempting to sum up the spirit of Samuel, it shows where Israel put him in the prophetic line.

The new dimension of prophetism is also foreshadowed in the activity of the court seer Nathan who is associated with David. Particularly when he confronts David over the Bathsheba-Uriah case, we hear the unmistakable voice of prophecy of the Amos

type, of a man conscious of his call by the Almighty to denounce evil in no matter what high place it is to be found (2 Sm 12). After the schism of the kingdoms, prophets of whom for the most part we know nothing but the names continue to intervene fearlessly between the will of God and the aspirations of kings. Ahijah of Shiloh, a temple prophet of the ancient Ephraimite sanctuary, first supports, then rejects Jeroboam, in correspondence to that prince's adherence to God's law (1 Kgs 11,29–39; 14,7–11). The prophet Shemaiah resists Rehoboam (2 Ch 12,5–7), and Jehu ben Hanani resists Baasha (1 Kgs 16,1–4). Azariah ben Obed advises Asa in his efforts of reform (2 Ch 15,1–7). We have already seen the figure of Micaiah ben Imlah (1 Kgs 22), in a story, it is true, that shows us that not every *nabi* of Israel and Judah had a part in the new prophetism. From those who had, however, the transition to Amos and Hosea is a natural one.

We are especially well informed about the prophets Elijah and Elisha, since the author of the Book of Kings took into his work almost unchanged a long cycle of stories that had grown around them, which must have been gathered together shortly after their deaths. In 1 Kgs 19,9 ff., Elijah is pictured fleeing for his life from the wicked king Ahab and his Tyrian wife Jezebel, in despair at the apparent hopelessness of his cause. He comes at length to the ancient mountain where God had appeared to Moses for the revelation of Israel's covenant. And

> behold, Yahweh passed by, and a great and driving wind rent the mountains and shattered the rocks before Yahweh. But Yahweh was not in the wind. After the wind, an earthquake. But Yahweh was not in the earthquake. Then after the earthquake, fire. But Yahweh was not in the fire. Then after the fire, there was heard a gentle breeze.

And Yahweh was in the gentle breeze.

On this mountain God had revealed himself to Moses in a great

wind, in an earthquake, and in fire. He appears to Elijah in a gentle breeze. This is to signify the intimacy with which he will declare himself to Elijah and the prophets who follow him. It also specifies the role of prophecy, whose insistence on the interior spirit of religion will complement the Law of Moses as the soul of its observances. Here we have the whole of Old Testament religion, which the Gospel recognizes when it tells of both Moses and Elijah at our Lord's Transfiguration.

This role of prophecy is nowhere better evidenced than in the scene described in 1 Kgs 21,17–24, where Elijah stands up to impeach Ahab who had been seduced by his foreign wife into destroying a humble Israelite. "... Thus says Yahweh: You have slain, and therefore come into an inheritance? ... Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in Yahweh's eyes, behold, I shall bring evil upon you. . . ." Elijah was defending not only Naboth's right to his good name and life and property, but also the social traditions of Israel on which Naboth had taken his stand. The same departure from Israelite ways that mingled sacrifice to Jezebel's Tyrian Baal with sacrifice to Yahweh also accounted for the alien conception of kingly power with which Jezebel had imbued her husband. In holding up to Ahab his violation of the law of Israel, Elijah is one with Amos at Bethel and Jeremiah in Jerusalem.

The biographer of Elisha had interests other than showing his affinity to the "social" prophecy of Amos and his followers. However, Elisha's words to Gehazi in 2 Kgs 5,26 show a spirit kindred to Elijah's. And so it is through the remainder of our fragmentary chronicle. From Samuel on, there is a continuous stream of Israelite prophets, all doing largely the same work; and this stream flows without interruption or change into the succession of prophets by whose names we call the prophetical books of the Old Testament.

There was always reason to believe that the difference between the "literary" and other prophets was only of detail. The trend of modern study is to remove even this detail, since it now appears that the prophets themselves did not write down their prophecies, and that we owe the prophetical books, generally speaking, to their

disciples. The first of the literary prophets, therefore, introduced very little innovation, either of content or method, into the tradition of Israelitic prophetism. We can trace the tradition back through Elijah to Samuel, and beyond Samuel into the obscurity of our sources.

3. THE DIMENSIONS OF PROPHECY

I spoke above of a consistent proclivity shown by the admirers of the prophets, to refashion them after their own ideals. Victorian commentators sometimes appear to have thought of the prophets as liberal vicars or nonconformist chaplains, of advanced views, surely, but with the same bluff piety that made the Empire great. There was little room in this placid pastoral scene for an Elijah slavering in the throes of ecstatic seizure, an Isaiah walking mother naked as a warning to Egypt, an Hosea agonizing over his prostitute wife, an Ezekiel cooking over cattle dung to drive home a point, or even an Amos addressing the respectable dowagers of the parish as fat cows. With the flair of the born journalist, Ernest Renan toward the end of the last century caricatured the prophets as the first radical pamphleteers. Even serious students of the Bible, particularly those infected by sociology, have not entirely shed the illusion that the prophets were grass-roots economists, distributists, or political dilettantes of one color or another. We still read of them as spearheading a movement of return to the "nomadic-peasant ideal"; which is indeed curious, since it would be hard to imagine two classes of men more traditionally opposed in their aspirations than the nomad and the peasant.

It is essential, therefore, that we spare the prophets the honor of naturalization into our culture, and that instead we restore them to their own, which was an exotic Oriental one. As their contemporaries saw them, they were *inspired men*, and as such they had counterparts throughout all the nations of the world they knew. The inspired man furthered ends that often had little if anything to do with his own ideas or tastes. He was recognized to be in com-

munication with that otherness that men have always associated with the divine. He was known to be in touch with realities that could not altogether be reduced to the terms of everyday experience, which from one point of view might even be thought at times irrational. The oracles of the prophets did not follow on any concept they had of the rights of man, or ethical theory, or an ideal commonwealth. They were produced by what is today but a department of man's complicated existence, but was to ancient man a vital determinant of his existence, namely, by religion.

Thus it is that what both unites the prophets with their contemporary world and wholly sunders them from it is religion. Religion today has been made so much a synonym for respectability, a thing that every politician must have a decent amount of along with a dog and a wife, that we have a foolish way of thinking it an invariable benefit to society. But when religion is taken seriously, it is nothing if not an attempt to achieve contact with the divine. It makes a great deal of difference, obviously, what divinity's contact is sought, and what means are used in seeking it. A practitioner of thuggee was highly religious, according to his lights. So were the ritual prostitutes in the temples of Ishtar or Aphrodite. So is the consecrated nun, the mystic, the priest of the old or new covenant, the Buddhist at peace in nirvana or the Muslim hard at work in jihad. To be thought religious is not necessarily a compliment, from either an esthetic or a moral point of view.

What gives Israelitic prophetism its distinctly moral tone almost if not quite from the very beginning, is the distinctly moral character of Israelitic religion. The prophets stand out in history because Israel stands out in history. They are what they are because Israel is what it is.

If it is not absolutely true that Israel alone in the ancient world united religion with morality, it is so nearly absolute that we can disregard any demurrer. It is a tribute to Israel's success, which was inherited by Christianity, that we take the union for granted. But it was not generally so, nor is it always so outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. Religion is by nature moral only if the gods are

deemed moral, and this was hardly the rule among the ancients. The difference was made in Israel by the moral nature of the God who had revealed himself.

We are not saying, of course, that other ancient peoples were immoral, but that their morality had practically nothing to do with their religion. Morality was, as it is today, the business of human custom and experience, of practical sense and the recognition of duty and right, made up of a thousand interlocking considerations. Religion was making sure that one stood in a proper relation to the powers behind the elements of the world, and since these powers were often irrational and unpredictable, what went on in religion could easily conflict with the essentially rational sphere of morality. The Babylonian woman who was required, once in her lifetime, to serve as a hierodule in the state temple, may have done so in revolt against every moral dictate of her conscience. But such was religion. The ancient Egyptian who took with him to the tomb written formulas guaranteed to get him past Anubis, the god of judgment, by elaborate deceits, could be thought a hypocrite by modern standards. But the modern standards would assume the connection of religion with morality, which was not the case. The Egyptian was handling religious matters in a religious way; his moral life, something quite different, may have been irreproachable.

Religion in the ancient world was almost universally synonymous with magic. William James correctly observed that magic, the attempt to manipulate affairs by naturally inadequate means, is not primitive religion but primitive science; still, the early mating of religion and magic was inevitable. Religion had to achieve its contact with the unseen world in some way or other, and where deity was immanent in nature and not transcendent of it in historical revelation, the route was through magic.

Popular Israelitic religion itself was not always immune from the fascination of magic. When the prophets condemn Israel for attaching an automatic value to the mere form of a sacrifice, they condemn it for mixing magic with religion. The figurines turned up by the thousands in the excavated sites of Palestinian archeology,

dating from every period of Israelite habitation, betray a wide belief in the efficacy of fertility charms, even though they had lost their original significance as images of the mother goddess. Necromancy was also practised, as we know from the graphic story in 1 Sm 28,3 ff., and the Bible refers to various other divinatory methods that were in use. All this was forbidden by law, but the law was unable to stamp it out entirely. The source of much of it, before the rigorous Deuteronomic reform that finally abolished the "high places," were the local shrines that dotted the land. In these shrines, many of them scarcely converted from Canaanite use, Yahweh was often indistinguishable from the Baal whom he had supplanted or was even identified with him. Just a few years ago archeologists found at Hazor for the first time the remains of one of these idolatrous shrines, from the premonarchical period of Israel's history.

While Israelitic religion officially disavowed magical practice, pagan religion adopted it as a matter of course. This fact, together with a pervading preoccupation with demonology (a dualism that hardly touches the religion of Israel at all), foredooms any hope of finding moral concerns in the religions of the Gentiles. They are perhaps not lacking altogether, but they are so very few, and stretched thinly over so many centuries, as to be virtually nonexistent.

It would have been strange had there been no quickening of the spirit whatever outside Israel, had there been no vision however dim of the moral religion preached by the prophets. Among the documents belonging to the seventh-century library of Ashurbanipal, discovered at Nineveh in 1853, appears a questionnaire used by *baru* priests to interrogate their clients. Some of the questions might well have been asked by the prophets of conscientious Israelites:

> Has he bribed a judge? . . . Has he oppressed a weak woman? . . . Has he used false scales? . . . Has he set up a wrong boundary stone, failed to set up a right boundary stone? Has he re-

moved a boundary line, a limit, or a boundary stone? . . . Has he carried off his neighbor's garment?

But mixed in with these moral notes are references to the violation of *tabus* and purely formal observances; the questionnaire itself is an incantation formula employed in a rite of sympathetic magic. The same judgment is to be made of similar formulas found in Egyptian religion. Moral considerations are not lacking in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and even in older texts which discuss the conditions on which one is to dwell with the gods. But they are combined with magic spells and ritual, so thoroughly blended that Egyptologists cannot decide whether the moral idea has been corrupted by the ever-present influence of magic, or whether it was only a formalism to begin with.

Some of the "wisdom" writings of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom—a period that followed an age of despotism—had authors who believed that the gods had a hand in the administration of justice and rightdoing. A Sumero-Babylonian hymn to the sun-god Shamash, also from Ashurbanipal's library, was composed in a like spirit. The testimony of the centuries is that the peoples of the ancient world deserved better gods than they knew and better religions than they had been taught to practise. Efforts there were to bridge the chasm between the morality of reason and the gods who were often unreason personified, but the efforts were rarely successful. Out of these religions could come only vague yearnings that were never to be satisfied.

Of all the peoples that shared the common culture of the ancient Near East, Israel was among the least developed economically and politically, still close in many ways to its rude, desert origins. Mesopotamia, the lawgiver then that Rome would be in a later age, organized its society more realistically and progressively than Israel ever did on its simpler level. This entailed, it is true, the abandonment as unworkable of some ancient Semitic social and family ideals to which Israel always clung stubbornly. The lawcode of

Hammurabi, the Lipit-Ishtar code and the code of Eshnunna that preceded it, and especially the Assyrian laws are models of practical statecraft where the Mosaic Law is mainly an appeal to the moral conscience. Hammurabi's laws were his own, they did not come from the god Shamash from whom he claimed his kingly power. In Mesopotamia, law became the art of the possible; it served its limited objectives well, but the objectives remained limited. Society became a closed system, static, uncritical of itself, and finally, unalterably part of the nature of things. Israel, along with its cruder social organization, possessed alike in its prophecy and its laws a dynamism that was the seed of evolution and change. The God who had made Israel could at any moment unmake it, or make it something else.

Despite the ties that bind the prophets of Israel to a general Near Eastern prophetic pattern, nothing could be expected from the Gentiles that deserves mention in the same breath with Israelitic prophetism. The inspired men of the Gentile religions could not rise above their origins. They could communicate no oracle from any god that failed to reflect the national convictions of a fixed and immutable social order. It is easy enough to find among the Gentile "prophets" the equivalent of Zedekiah ben Chenaanah (1 Kgs 22) or Hananiah ben Azzur (Jer 28), men through whom Yahweh did not speak, who voiced only national aspirations and the vain devices of their own hearts. It is not possible to find the equivalent of a Micaiah or a Jeremiah. These were not the lyric poets of a people or a state, but were produced by a religion that judged both people and state. Israelitic prophetism is unique because Israel itself is unique.

CHAPTER THREE

The Vision of the Prophet

1. THE VISION RECEIVED

Allusion has already been made to the variety of prophetic vision. Ecstatic seizure and the second sight of the seer were media respected and understood throughout the Near East. Ezekiel, who sometimes acts like a revenant of the earlier prophetism of Israel, perhaps has the best title among the canonical prophets to be considered an ecstatic, or at least one who was partially dependent on ecstatic vision. Ecstaticism, as a matter of fact, may have existed sporadically during the entire history of prophetism.

But in the main, those whom we have come to think of as prophets in the most customary sense of the word, the canonical or "literary" prophets of the Old Testament taken as a whole, do not seem to have had their revelations of God's mind by means of extraordinary psychic or mystical phenomena. This does not mean that their communication with God was not, as we would say, entirely supernatural, but simply that it was not accompanied exteriorly by any supernormal manifestation. This question is a much debated one among students of the Bible, but probably the majority would agree with this conclusion.

It seems to be borne out in most of the relatively rare descriptions the prophets themselves have given of their visions. A typical example is Amos' vision of the summer fruit (8,1–3):

> Thus the Lord Yahweh made me see: there was a basket of summer fruit. He asked, "What do you see, Amos?" And I answered, "A basket of summer fruit." Then Yahweh said to me: "The end is coming for my people Israel. I shall forgive them no longer...."

To the profane eye, there was present a basket of summer fruit (*qayits* in Hebrew) and nothing more. With prophetic insight, however, Amos recognizes in this common object a divinely given sign of Israel's coming end (*qets*). The word-play assists the connection of the two facts (the words may, in fact, have been pronounced alike in Amos' time); but only a consciousness of divine inspiration could permit the prophet to make the connection in Yahweh's name. Still, nothing suggests that this consciousness was other than through intellectual conviction on Amos' part.

We can take another example from an account of the prophet Jeremiah (13,1–11):

> Yahweh said to me: "Go buy yourself a linen loincloth and wear it on your loins, but do not dip it in water." I bought the loincloth as Yahweh had said, and I put it on my loins. Then the word of Yahweh came to me a second time: "Take the loincloth which you bought and which you are wearing on your loins, then rise and go to the Perath and hide it there in a cleft of the rock." I went and hid it by the Perath, just as Yahweh had commanded me. Then after many days Yahweh said to me: "Arise, go to the Perath, and bring back the loincloth which I commanded you to hide there." I went to the Perath, and searched, and recovered the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. Behold, the loincloth had rotted; it was good for nothing. Then the word of Yahweh came to me: "Thus says Yahweh: Even so will I cause the pride of Judah to rot, and the great pride of Jerusalem. This wicked people who refuse to hear my words, who walk in the stub-

bornness of their hearts and follow strange gods, serving and worshipping them, shall be like this loincloth which is good for nothing. For as the loincloth clings to the loins of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says Yahweh, to be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory; but they would not listen."

Here again, to all appearances the prophet would simply have been going his normal, if somewhat eccentric, way, acting out some rather elementary Semitic symbolism. It was in the prophet's own mind that the connection between this symbolism and the decision of Yahweh was revealed. The symbolism, to us perhaps farfetched in part, if not actually repugnant, is the very earthy type of sign that appealed to the Israelite and with which the prophetical books are filled. The loincloth, worn next to the body, stands for the chosen people who had been placed in a most intimate relation to God. Corruption comes to it from the Perath. This is the Hebrew name of the river Euphrates, beyond which lay Mesopotamia; it was thence that corruption had come upon Israel and Judah, through the adoption of the foreign, chiefly Assyrian, ways against which the prophets always inveighed, ways which had been substituted for the social and religious traditions of Israel. What is described here Jeremiah had seen happen to raw linen cloth many times, and therefore the action may have taken place entirely in his head, like the prophecies that came to him while musing at the potter's shop (18,1 ff.) or contemplating two baskets of figs (24, 1 ff.). The Euphrates, after all, was hundreds of miles away from Jeremiah, who was busy with many other things in Palestine. So circumstanced is his account, however, some authors believe he really acted it out at a similarly named stream near his home at Anathoth, today still called En-Fara, the source of modern Jerusalem's water supply.

The example I have just used belongs in the category of symbolic acts, of which the prophets are quite fond. Most of the prophetic

oracles, however, are words unaccompanied by actions. At least, they are unaccompanied now, in the text we have; some of them may once have been joined to some symbolic gesture, like the yoke worn by Jeremiah (27,2). At all events, the usually calm, matter-of-fact tone sustained by the prophetic words indicates that they were not born of frenzy or of psychic abnormality, but of a soul serenely conscious of its union with God.

We have already seen that it is to this consciousness of vocation that the prophets appeal in justifying their mission. They do not, ordinarily, claim to possess a prophetic "spirit," such as would be visibly manifest in ecstatic seizure. In 1 Kgs 22,24 the false prophet Zedekiah makes a claim of this kind against Micaiah, to which Micaiah replies only by asserting his unshakable assurance that it is he who speaks the word of God.

If ecstatic and similar phenomena play little part in the classical prophetism with which we are concerned, if there is reliance instead on what we must consider a more spiritual relation between God and prophet, in this, too, we may discern the hand of Providence. Personal holiness and conviction were inseparably allied with the prophetic office: the prophets were to communicate a spiritual message that had first been assimilated by spiritual men. Isaiah's sixth chapter contains a mighty vision of the prophet's experience of Yahweh's holiness, of his hatred of sin, and of the necessity to preach repentance to Judah. When Isaiah came forth with this message on his lips, it was with the consciousness that he himself had already been forgiven his own sin. Isaiah himself was the firstfruits, the earnest, of the spiritual Israel whom he was sent to form through his preaching.

The prophets, therefore, were not simply teachers of an elevated moral doctrine. They were inspired men who had had a personal and extraordinary encounter with God. They were very much aware of this and professed it in their every word; from this experience came their conviction that they spoke the word of Yahweh. And, lest there be any suspicion of self-deceit in this conviction, they have not disguised their personal reluctance, and even repug-

nance at times, to preach the word that God had revealed through them.

No better illustration of the dual personality of a prophet, as prophet and as man, can be found outside the life of Jeremiah. Diffident, even timid by nature, Jeremiah recognized in himself, though in conflict with all his own desires and inclinations, the compulsion to speak some of God's sternest words ever uttered against his people, to the end that the prophet's life was frequently in danger and he continually had to endure persecution and harassment. In his intimate "confessions," which originally he may not have intended for publication, Jeremiah often remonstrates with God, and even chides him for what he has been forced to undergo. Here is poignant proof that the prophet did not lose his personality by submitting it to God's, and that he knew very well what were his and what were the divine views on any matter.

The inspiration of the prophets doubtless has some relation to the mystical union with which God has favored many of the saints. The two are not exactly the same, however, for each has its own purposes not to be confused with the other's. Then, too, the inspiration of each prophet was somewhat different from that of another. Into prophecy went both the distinctive personalities of the individual prophets and the specific gifts with which God endowed them.

"Charisma" and "grace" are terms used by theologians for these gifts. If we cannot penetrate fully their mysterious processes, we can know their reality from their effects. From the prophets we have learnt what it means for God to speak to man.

2. THE VISION COMMUNICATED

We read the prophets as the result of a transmission that was first oral, then written. As they are now preserved for us the prophetical books are the work of later hands that have gathered the prophets' material and arranged it in some logical order, much as was done with our Lord's words in the Gospels. This arrangement

ordinarily had very little to do with relative chronology, which can sometimes be restored on internal grounds, but just as often must be guessed. It is important for interpretation that we fit the elements of the prophetic collections with the known facts of the prophets' lives to the extent that we can, but often enough there is now no way of doing this.

In the prophetical books we frequently find what has been written *about* the prophet rather than by him. While it is always possible, of course, that the prophet told of himself in the third person, it is much more likely that these accounts are the work of his disciples or followers. As far as Jeremiah is concerned, we know certainly that these words, or many of them at least, were written by his disciple Baruch. The authors of these passages were gifted with scriptural inspiration, of course, but the texts are not properly prophetical except when they cite the words of the prophets.

The commonest form of prophetical expression is the *oracle*, a message from God, spoken by the prophet in the first person, usually with the explicit notation that this is the word of Yahweh. Originally an oral utterance, the oracle is ordinarily brief. In the prophetical books we often find quite lengthy oracles, or series of oracles, which may be taken as a literary elaboration by the prophet or an editor who has joined shorter oracles of similar content or form.

The oracle is normally poetic. In modern society poetry is largely a literary exercise removed from the rough-and-tumble of everyday life, but this was not so in antiquity when national sagas, the utterances of the sages, and the epics of the past were invariably treasured up in poetry. Poetry, by its rhythm and distinctive vocabulary, was better suited for arresting oral communication than was prose. Even today, great words that have affected human conduct widely and are likely to impress themselves on posterity—the Gettysburg Address, perhaps, or Sir Winston Churchill's wartime speeches—often contain an elementary kind of poetry. And, to be sure, the poetry of the prophets is rather rudimentary, consisting in assonances, rhythm, alliteration, and little more. Prose

they sometimes use, but with less frequency. It becomes more common with later prophets but remains quite rare with the earlier ones.

The oracle may vary as to content. There is a prevalence of warnings and condemnations, for the chief function of the prophet was to reveal the moral will of God to a disobedient people. But there are also oracles of consolation and promise. It is wrong to conclude, as some older critics did, that because of their conviction of Yahweh's justice the prophets could not also prophesy good. This sort of criticism relied on the assumption that the prophet knew of nothing but human judgments and justice, which are not always those of God. It must be admitted, however, that the sometimes paradoxical juxtaposition of doom- and weal-oracles in the prophetical books may be the result of later artistic arrangement or even, at times, of the insertion of material from other prophetic sources.

Israel, or Judah, or both are the customary subject of the oracle, for the prophet's mission was first and foremost to the people of God. But all the prophetical books contain oracles addressed to the neighboring Gentile nations as well. These, too, find their place in life in the prophets' mission, though their location in the prophetic collections is usually artificial and they have frequently been generously supplemented by later writers.

In the oracle the prophet is most consciously fulfilling his duty to reveal the mind of God. He is also, however, a teacher, and thus a companion literary form to the oracle is the prophetic *sermon.* The sermon may also contain oracular words, but essentially it is the prophet's preaching in his own right, of a piece with St. Paul's moral exhortations or some of the didactic Psalms. In the course of their oracles or sermons the prophets sometimes allude to a body of traditional instruction (*torah*, often translated "law") on which they draw (Is 1,10 for example). This *torah* is at times identical with what is now preserved in the Mosaic Law of the Pentateuch, but generally it refers to a broader basis of traditional moral teaching maintained in both priestly and prophetical circles

in Israel. The existence of this *torah* explains some of the sameness of prophetic expression, even when there is no question of the direct dependence of one prophet on another.

There is some autobiographical material in various of the books, the prophet detailing his own experiences for a didactic purpose. Pure poetry is sometimes found, taking the form of lyrics and hymns. In the latter we may see an influence exercised on the prophets by the common religion of Israel, since much of this poetry appears to be liturgical in its inspiration.

A poetic form that is fairly common with the prophets is the dirge (in Hebrew, *qinah*), a composition sustaining a distinctive rhythmic line in which three beats are separated from another two beats by a cesura—somewhat like the tempo of a death march. A more or less elaborate production of this kind was evidently not delivered in the white heat of oratory, but represents the prophet's dramatic recasting of his doom-oracle or sermon in the leisure of his reflection. In its funereal evocations the *qinah* is related to the symbolic act.

The symbolic act, whether accompanied by words or not, is a dramatized prophecy. Jeremiah's yoke, Isaiah's nakedness, Ezekiel's dumbness, Hosea's marriage, are all symbolic acts. Some of our Lord's teaching as described in the Gospels, his "parables in action," are very like them. The symbolic act comes quite naturally to an imaginative people in love with the concrete. Some scholars believe that a gesture like Ezekiel's drawing an arrow on a brick to indicate the route of conquest from Babylon to Jerusalem may have had a forgotten origin in sympathetic magic: the action itself was supposed to produce what it signified. This may well be, but it is quite certain that no such notion was in the minds of the prophets, any more than the children who might romp about a Maypole today would have any idea of its sinister meaning for their pagan ancestors. The prophets employ symbolic acts only to show what Yahweh will do; to them it would have been preposterous to attribute an effect to anything else.

In their words and actions the prophets are trying to convey in

human terms their experience of the divine, and this is not always possible to do in any adequate sense. The mystics in their own turn often complain of the inadequacy of the only language they could use to tell others what they had seen and heard with God. Prophet and mystic alike have done their best to capture the ineluctable word of God within limits that it necessarily transcends. Aware of their shortcomings, the prophets do nevertheless claim without hesitation to communicate the mind of God. The better ability of some to give voice to this communication, quite apart from the magnitude of the revelations with which they were entrusted, justifies our recognizing in them the greater prophets.

3. THE LIMITS OF VISION

Not only is the prophet limited in the communication of his vision by the inadequacies of human language, he is limited as well by his own human inadequacy. He communicates a message that is greater than himself, and his own understanding of it is not necessarily broader than his contemporaries'. Prophecy is a revealed mystery to him also.

Many prophecies, of course, were clear enough from the beginning, but others remain obscure to this day, to be a perennial bone of scriptural contention. In a certain true sense, prophecy is understood wholly only in its fulfilment—here we are speaking, evidently, of prophecy that contains a word for the future. This fulfilment may have been hidden as much from the prophet himself as from any other; the time and manner in which God's words were to be accomplished were not invariably included in his vision.

Numerous classic examples demonstrate the truth of this assertion. When Jeremiah prophesied that the hated king Jehoiakim would receive "the burial of an ass" (22,19), he meant no burial at all, that the king's body would be cast out of the city like offal. However, from 2 Kgs 24,6 and 2 Ch 36,8 it appears that Jehoiakim was given a normal royal burial "with his fathers" in Jerusalem.

At the same time, there is no doubt that Jehoiakim died a death of disgrace, loathed by his people for the horrors which his perfidy had brought upon them. What Jeremiah predicted might very well have been carried out in literal detail, though it does not seem to have been. The prophet obviously had no photographic vision of the future. The fact that Jeremiah's prophecies have been transmitted to us by editors who knew very well about Jehoiakim's death and burial shows that they recognized no incongruity between prediction and fulfilment. Nothing further was expected of the prophet than what we have.

In Is 10,27–34 the prophet prophesies the Assyrian invasion of Palestine in a vivid word picture portraying the Assyrian army advancing from the north, the normal route of invasion, crushing its way city by city through Geba, Gibeah, Anathoth, and Nob, till it reaches the summit of Mount Zion. Isaiah's prophecy of invasion was fulfilled, but when it came, Sennacherib followed the seacoast and entered Jerusalem from the west. Again, the prophetic vision did not extend to the contingencies of fulfilment, only to its substance.

Long ago St. Thomas took account of this peculiarity of prophecy:

> Sometimes prophetic revelation reflects divine foreknowledge as it knows the order of cause and effect. In such cases it sometimes happens that the event is other than was prophesied. However, the prophecy has not proved false, for its sense was: according to the course of secondary natural causes or of human acts, such an effect should follow.[1]

Much Old Testament prophecy of the future falls in this category. Another good example is in the detailed prophecies against Babylon, in Is 13,17 ff.; 14,4 ff.; Jer 50,15; 51,58 and elsewhere.

[1] *Summa Theologica*, 2da 2dae, q. 171, a. 6 *ad* 2.

Babylon, said the prophets, would be destroyed by the Medes, leveled like Sodom and Gomorrah, to become a dwelling only for wild beasts, its walls thrown down, its gates burnt with fire, its king brought down to Sheol. The prophets were describing what was the only too customary fate of an imperial city left to the mercies of its conquerors. Babylon was overthrown, not by the Medes but by the Persians who succeeded them; and the conquest of the city was peaceful, without bloodshed or destruction. Babylon remained—under different auspices—a powerful and important city for years to come.

As I pointed out in the Introduction, the messianic prophecies suppose yet another limitation of the prophetic vision. While the prophets, or at least most of the prophets, were looking for a Messiah, none of them had a clear and adequate idea of what the Messiah would ultimately be. Or to be more realistic about it, they did have certain ideas, which they shared with their contemporaries, that were quite different from what the event proved the Messiah to be. In the messianic prophecies, too, the prophets thought of the divine plan in terms of the normal contingencies, while as a matter of fact it was to exceed them utterly.

Messianism means many things to many people, so we must explain what we mean by it here. At its widest and simplest, it is nothing more or less than Israel's conviction of its own final destiny as planned for it by God. Israel knew that it had been chosen by Yahweh as his special people: this belief, accepted by the prophets, already exists fully developed in the earliest texts of the Old Testament. As taught by the prophets, this doctrine of election was seen as God's selection of Israel for a special design of his own. As he is the God of the entire world of man—and this is clearly recognized by Amos, the first of the literary prophets—his design had to embrace in some fashion the entire human race. Israel, then, had been chosen to serve the purpose of a divine dispensation for mankind.

Now this is messianism, though it is not the precise thing that the Christian ordinarily understands by messianism. It is neces-

sarily presupposed, however, for any more precise understanding of messianism. The prophets did not stop at this point, they also had some idea of what the end result of election must be, in God's time. We also find with Amos another teaching that he did not originate, the doctrine of "the remnant," which by definition assumes that God's design is for the Israel of faith rather than for the nation pure and simple. All that was implied in this teaching was certainly not realized at the time, but it provides the substance of the hope that we rightly claim to have seen fulfilled in the New Testament.

Practically all the prophets predict the restoration of Israel as part of the working out of God's design. Punishment there must be, but after it salvation, for God's plan is a holy one that cannot be frustrated by human malice. The restoration for which the prophets looked they naturally conceived in the lineaments of the historical Israel they knew. Their prophecies were, in fact, fulfilled in an Israel that far surpassed the one they had known. They would not have repudiated this fulfilment had they known of it, but they could not have known it without being Christians before the time. The Old and New Testaments are organically connected: fulfilment has no meaning without prophecy, and supposes it. Nevertheless, fulfilment also surpasses prophecy, for the history of revelation is always dynamic, never static.

The Christian tends to think of messianism more or less exclusively as *personal* messianism, that is, of prophecy which involves the person of the Messiah through whom the messianic hopes were to be realized. Personal messianism is, of course, part of the prophetic message; but we must acknowledge that in this messianism, too, our understanding in the light of fulfilment far exceeds the prophets'. The messianic king for whom the prophets waited was not merely fulfilled in Jesus Christ, he was surpassed so utterly as to be beyond anything they could possibly have hoped for or imagined. But again, we can say that the prophets would have been far from repudiating the fulfilment could they but have known it.

The Old Testament is separated from the New not only by

itself—that is, by its different and more limited perspective—but also by a history that for the most part lies outside both Testaments. There is no continuity of prophecy that extends unbroken from the Old Testament into the New; between the two Testaments stands something else, a period of waiting without prophecy, a period of waiting and thinking.

In 165 B.C., after the bitter persecution endured under the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, when the Jews under Maccabean leadership had recaptured Jerusalem, "they deliberated what to do about the altar of holocausts, which had been profaned. They thought it best to tear it down lest it bring shame to them, since the Gentiles had defiled it. They tore it down and stored its stones in a convenient place on the mountain of the temple until a prophet might come who would tell them what to do with them" (1 Mc 4,44–46). This prophet never came, for prophecy had come to an end in Israel.

But the words of the prophets remained, which were remembered and thought through and through again in the ages that followed. As it became more and more apparent that the prophecies had not been fulfilled in the way that had been expected, the conviction grew that they would be fulfilled in another way and in another day.

The New Testament is as much the result of this rethinking of prophecy as it is of prophecy itself. After the Babylonian exile the people Israel never truly regained control of its political destinies, but existed under successive foreign dominations. Only during the brief Maccabean age was a Jewish state established, and then under such circumstances that no one could long be deceived into supposing it the messianic fulfilment. The later Hasmoneans who called themselves kings of Israel were not of the House of David and thus lacked what was regarded as an essential quality of the messianic king. Even their exercise of the high priesthood was, strictly speaking, illegal. Eventually, they were cordially hated as trailing greater evils than ever did foreign ruler, as the very antitheses of the just king who had been promised.

So it came about that while some Jews abandoned hope in the messianic prophecies altogether, many others began to look for their fulfilment in a new age to come. This was the opening up of the vision of apocalyptic, which can be seen in its purest form in the Apocalypse of St. John, but has influenced all of the New Testament. At its best—for there was both good and bad speculation in apocalyptic—this new vision of prophecy spiritualized it further and laid less emphasis on the national aspects of messianic fulfilment. Encouraging this trend was the fact that by now far more Jews lived outside Palestine than in it. Many of them had never returned from the captivity, for they had found the life in Babylonia to their liking. Others had migrated to other nearby lands to form the *diaspora*, "the dispersion." These Jews, living in foreign lands among Gentiles, cut off from the ritual centered in Jerusalem, naturally turned toward the more spiritual and universal elements in their religion, which were quite as operative in Egypt or Asia Minor as in Palestine. Jews became aware as never before that the world was wide, and that the God who created it had not done so to relinquish it forever to the power of evil. Judaism became a proselytizing religion, seeking converts among the nations that they might also share in the salvation promised through the Jews.

Out of this ferment emerged a great literature, apocalyptic and otherwise, reflecting every conceivable point of view on Israel and its destiny and what was to be made of the prophecies. Some of it approaches the New Testament in the breadth of its outlook, and some of it is the most retrograde kind of reaction. Some of it is only now being rediscovered after lying buried twenty centuries in the caves of the wilderness of Judea. Most of it appeared too late ever to be included in the Jewish canon of sacred books, but every student of the Bible knows how important it is for understanding properly the transition from the Old Testament to the New. Some of its best efforts find their culmination in the thinking of the authors of the New Testament. The New Testament interpretation of prophecy cannot be severed from the developed

and developing Jewish tradition that continued after prophetism was no more.

We are brought back to the point of our departure, the true dimensions of prophecy. Prophecy was a spark that ignited a flame, but the prophets themselves were not to see the full soar of its blaze. Though they are the indispensable heralds of the New Testament and its Christ, they herald from without, standing on the firm soil of historical Israel. There they have their divinely appointed habitation and abode, which need no justification from any of us.

PART TWO

The Prophets of the Eighth Century

AMOS OF TEKOA
HOSEA BEN BEERI
MICAH OF MORESHETH
ISAIAH BEN AMOZ

CHAPTER FOUR

Amos of Tekoa

A NOTE ON THE TEXT OF AMOS' PROPHECIES

The collected prophecies of Amos begin with a chronological title (1,1), the work of the editor of the book, and are introduced by an exordium (1,2) attributing his words to Yahweh of Judah, though they are addressed to northern Israel (Carmel). This second verse is doubtless Amos', though we do not know its original context.

In 1,3–2,5 follows a series of oracles against foreign nations, all cast in the same poetic form, which serves to introduce dramatically Amos' first denunciation of Israel (2,6–16). In the following pages I conceive that this order and dramatic effect were Amos' own, but it is equally possible that they are the result of later editorial work. Formerly it has been held that one or several of the oracles against the nations came from a later period when there was the tendency to supplement these sections of the prophetic writings. Today, however, they are all generally accepted as Amos', with the exception of 2,4 f., the oracle against Judah. This last does look like a later supplement, from the time when Amos' prophecies were circulated in Judah.

In 3,1–6,14 we find the major collection of Amos' oracles against Israel, denouncing sins of various kinds, proclaiming the certainty of the prophetic word (3,3–8), reminding of past disasters sent by

God as warnings (4,6–11), and predicting the utter destruction of land and people. The internal evidence favors the view that these oracles were spoken in various places on various occasions; it is impossible to reconstruct from them a chronology of the prophet's ministry. To this collection 8,4–14, of the same content and form, rightly belong: no one can give a satisfactory explanation of the present position of these verses, interrupting as they do Amos' accounts of his visions. All these texts may be regarded as Amos' own, except for 4,13 and 5,8 f. These verses, together with 9,5 f., are fragments of an ancient hymn that has been inserted into the prophecy (probably not by Amos himself) at appropriate intervals.

In chapters 7–9 appear Amos' accounts of five visions: of locusts (7,1–3), fire (7,4–6), a plumb line (7,7–9), the summer fruit (8,1–3), and the altar (9,1–4 continued by 9,7–10). After the third vision, with its reference to Jeroboam II and the doom of the sanctuaries of Israel, the editor found a logical place for 7,10–17, an inspired writer's biographical narrative that is evidently connected with the vision.

The final verses of the book, 9,11–15, seem to be the work of a much later Judahite prophet who wrote after the fulfilment of the prophesied destruction of both Israel and Judah. It is not impossible that an eighth-century prophet could have spoken these words of consolation and a vision of a glorious future, but they are hard to imagine on the lips of Amos, who is so uncompromising in his outlook. Salvation oracles of this kind are the characteristic of postexilic prophecy, and are relatively rare in the pre-exilic prophets.

1. THE TIME OF THE PROPHET

It was probably during the second half of Jeroboam II's long reign over the northern kingdom of Israel (782–753 B.C.) that the prophet Amos descended on the royal sanctuary at Bethel. To

understand what Amos was doing there, we really must review a little of Israel's history. I shall try to do it as briefly as possible.

The story of the conquest of the land of Canaan by Israelite tribes is told chiefly by the Book of Joshua. On the conquest succeeded a period of some two centuries known traditionally as that of "the Judges" (in the Semitic world a "judge" was a ruler). This was an age of consolidation, of settling down, of adapting to new ways and beginning new traditions. Some of the events of the period, artificially run together as a continuous narrative, are described in the Book of Judges. Most of all, this age saw the conclusion of the conquest, which was not the work of a year or even of a century. Many Canaanite towns were taken and sacked, and Israelite settlements were built on their ruins. Others could not be taken, and were either left to themselves or brought into federation with the Israelites by treaty. Often Israelites and Canaanites lived side by side in the same city, as is supposed in the story of Gideon and Abimelech in Jgs 6–9.

During this period Israel's tribal system began to break down, to be replaced by the first movements toward a state. The tribal heroes who were the Judges stirred their people to desire a more stable and central leadership than had been possible or required under the tribal system. Though Israel still remained essentially a federation of tribes capable of unified action only in occasional emergencies, the great victory of Deborah and Barak in the valley of Jezreel (Jgs 4 f.) brought into one the cluster of tribes in the extreme north and those in the highlands of Ephraim, which heretofore had been separated by hostile Canaanite cities. As the period receded, therefore, there were left for all practical purposes only two "tribes" in Israelitic Palestine—the north, under the nominal leadership of the powerful tribe of Ephraim, and the still isolated south, the tribe of Judah. These were to remain Israel's political divisions throughout its subsequent history.

The period was also one of cultural growth. From their Canaanite neighbors the Israelites derived their art, their architecture, their methods of agriculture, and all that went with the life of a

settled people. They who had entered fiercely from the desert to fall on the cities and farms of Canaan, by the end of the period were themselves firmly sedentary, now beating off attacks of other marauders, their erstwhile allies. From the Canaanites Israel also borrowed many religious externals. The ancient sanctuaries on "high places" and in groves throughout the land were adapted to the worship of the Israelite Yahweh. Sometimes the adaptation was imperfect: the Yahweh worshipped at Gibeon or Bethel or Hazor could be too readily confused with the Canaanite Baal formerly worshipped there, especially when many of the old rites and customs of the shrines had been preserved unchanged, and when Yahweh might even be invoked under the name Baal ("Master"). The Bible leaves us in no doubt that while Yahwistic religion had been retained by the vast majority of Israelites, it had been considerably contaminated by the religion of Canaan, in the process called syncretism. More rarely, Israelites abandoned the worship of Yahweh entirely and gave themselves over to idolatry—which meant the fertility rites of Canaan. As I mentioned above, archeologists have only recently found the first concrete evidence of such apostasy in a pagan temple at Hazor, built by close descendants of the stern monotheists who had conquered the city, razed its walls, and smashed its idolatrous altars into bits.

Thus Israel emerged from the period of the Judges with a tendency toward unification, but weakened in what had principally contributed to its unity—its religion and the many traditions tied up with it. The author of the final chapters of the Book of Judges, who gathered some ancient historical materials together to form a supplement to the book, spoke the mind of many Israelites in his analysis of the age and of what needed to be done. His solution—and in it he differed quite sharply with the original author of the book—was a simple one. To him the period of the Judges had been near anarchy for lack of effective leadership. Israel, he said, needed a king.

External pressures favored the demand for kingship in Israel. While the loose tribal organization with occasional broader alli-

ances had been sufficient for the piecemeal conquest of the Canaanite city-states and to resist the attacks of nomadic raiders, there was within the borders of Palestine a foreign enclave that daily assumed more alarming proportions to menace the Israelite possession of the land. The Philistines, a non-Semitic people related to the Greeks, had invaded the Palestinian coast at approximately the same time of the main Israelite thrust from the east. They were to remain there tenaciously through most of Israelite history, and they would even give foreigners their name for the entire country, Palestine, "land of the Philistines." As the age of the Judges closed they were aggressively on the march, determined to dominate the hinterland, even as the story of Samson (Jgs 13–16) shows how thoroughly they dominated the country of Dan, on the borders of Judah. At the battle of Aphek (1 Sm 4,1–11) they completely routed the Israelites, captured their sacred palladium, the Ark of the Covenant, and had the whole land virtually at their mercy. Thus the cry arose, a king to make Israel like the other nations, a king to give leadership and victory in Israel's battles.

There was also bitter opposition to the idea of kingship. In part, the prophets shared this opposition, for reasons we shall see. The antimonarchical principle was summed up most explicitly in 1 Sm 8,11–17, in words ascribed to the prophet Samuel:

> This will be the way in which the king will rule over you: He will take your sons for his charioteers and horsemen, and they will run before his chariot. He will make them his leaders of thousands and of fifties, he will make them his craftsmen and his harvesters, his armorers and wheelwrights. He will turn your daughters into mixers of spices, and cooks, and bakers. He will take your best fields, vineyards, and olive trees and give them to his officials. He will take a tenth of your harvests and your vineyards and give them to his courtiers and officials. But your slaves and handmaids, your best oxen and asses he will take and use for his works. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will be his slaves.

These forebodings were more than fulfilled in some of the Israelite kings, and they were already well founded in the example of the kings of the surrounding nations with which Israelites were familiar. It was only through a real revolution of the spirit that the freedom-loving tribesmen of Israel could bring themselves to take their chances with the caprices of royalty, to take the fatal step that could not be recalled. There were also many religious dangers involved in the step. But the present peril could not be ignored, and therefore Israel chose a king.

Thus the brooding Saul, the son of Kish, came to the throne. It is true that his rule was only nominally acknowledged, if acknowledged at all, in much of Israel. His sphere of influence extended mainly to the territory of Benjamin and the highlands of Ephraim. He had no standing army. Archeological findings at Tell el-Ful, the place known in the Bible as the Gibeah of Saul, have revealed the modest proportions of his palace. He was unable to rally enough national strength to allay the Philistine menace, and at his death the Philistines held the initiative on almost every front. Nevertheless, Saul marked the end of rule by the Judges and the beginning of monarchy.

It was about the year 1004 B.C. that David the son of Jesse was anointed king of Judah at Hebron. Seven years later, after an interval of ineffective government by Saul's son Ishbaal, northern Israel also accepted David as king. "All the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David the king made a covenant with them in Hebron in the presence of Yahweh, and they anointed David king over Israel" (2 Sm 5,1–3). The united kingdom of Israel and Judah had been born.

With the exception of Moses, no other man ever succeeded in captivating the Israelite imagination as did David. The Bible does not leave us unaware of the man's faults: he was a failure as a father, he mismanaged his personal affairs shamefully, and there was always in him a bit of the opportunist and vulgar show-off. But he was also generous to a fault, entirely simple in his loves and hatreds, and—this above all—a great general and statesman. Whereas Moses

had made Israel a people, David made it a nation and a state. Forever after he was to linger in the Israelite mind as the figure of an ideal king, and when later generations longed for the fulfilment of the glorious promises inherent in Israel's election, they crystallized their hopes in waiting for a messianic king who would be another David and of his line.

From the first, David proved to be a businesslike king. For his capital he chose and conquered Jerusalem, a city on the border of Ephraim and Judah but belonging to neither, until David's time still in Canaanite hands and therefore with no prior Israelite connections to provoke the intertribal jealousies that had been so pronounced in the days of the Judges. This city he made also the religious capital of the nation, bringing to it the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of the common religion that had been Israel's unity till now. And he secured the nation, driving the Philistines back into the enclave of their five cities, conquering Moab, Ammon, and Edom to the east and reducing them to bondage, conquering or binding by alliance the Aramean states to the north and the newly formed mercantile kingdom of Phoenicia. The Philistine monopoly in iron, which had seriously hampered Israel's war effort and had subjected its agriculture to ruinous tribute (1 Sm 13,19–21; Jgs 5,8), was now broken. An economic revolution now occurred, for iron tools made possible an intensification of agriculture, and the result of this was the beginning of foreign trade and commerce. The earliest iron tool that has been discovered in Palestine is a single ploughpoint from the Gibeah of Saul; after David's time iron is common.

Thus David handed on to Solomon a secure little empire. Solomon, for all that he gained a reputation for wisdom (at least in his early years), and though he mightily impressed Israel's historians with the splendor and opulence of his court, was not the man his father was. He acquired the throne through court politics, and throughout his reign he displayed the nervousness of the born intriguer. He capitalized on David's inheritance, entering into trade on a large scale, particularly with Phoenicia, even fitting out a

merchant fleet which sailed with the Phoenicians from its home port in Edom on the Red Sea. Archeology has afforded ample confirmation of the wealth which the Bible associates with his reign: cities that he built at Eglon, Hazor, Gezer, Taanach, and Megiddo as storehouses for his grain speculation, stables for the horses that he traded between Egypt and the little states of Asia Minor, and export and import bases for the wine and oil industry, together with his mines and smelters in the basin of the Arabah which were staffed with slave labor exacted from the Edomites.

But Solomon also began a social change that was to survive him long after his wealth had been forgotten, when his gold from Ophir and ships of Tarshish were only dimly recalled legends. The bitter fruits of this change were being reaped in Israel when Amos rose to prophesy.

Without doubt the most radical break with the past introduced by Solomon was the imposition of *corvée*, forced labor for the state. It was this above all that epitomized the grievances against his rule lodged by the men of Ephraim (1 Kgs 12,3–5). His adoption of this institution, wholly alien to the ways of free Israelites, must be laid to the credit of the Phoenician influence to which he had committed Israel, for *corvée* had existed in Canaan long before Israelite times. The author of the Solomonic history that was incorporated into the Book of Kings tried to minimize this crime against tradition by saying that foreigners were assigned the worst of the work; however, there is no doubt that the extensive public constructions of Solomon's reign were owed in large measure to the unrewarded toil of his own people.

In David's time the average Israelite probably would have been conscious of very little change in the social order with which he was familiar. Like Saul, David had respected Israel's "democratic" spirit, and aside from a few arbitrary acts of the kind we are all capable of, he showed little ambition to be a despot. David's sons did not live as Solomon's, idle hangers-on at court, but as working farmers and ranchers. Israel remained for the most part a land of farmers and shepherds who lived together in villages that gov-

erned themselves by their own local laws and traditions. Social distinctions did not much impinge on daily life. Houses in which master and man dwelt together as one on a single level are not significant of a highly stratified society, and such were the Israelite houses of the period in sharp contrast to the separate slave quarters of the Canaanite manors. The fact that David had to take Uriah's wife by stealth and tried to avoid detection of his adultery at all costs, evinces a society in which even the king was subject to public opinion. The woman of Tekoa, Amos' home village, did not count in vain on having her case heard by an approachable king (2 Sm 14,4–7), and the demagogue Absalom was easily able to abuse the conviction that the meanest Israelite had the right to the king's ear (2 Sm 15,1–6). Though the king had now taken over some of what was previously decided by tribal authority, it is plain that he was as much constrained by traditional customs as were his subjects. We read of a "law of the kingdom" set in writing by Samuel on the occasion of Saul's accession (1 Sm 10,25), and we saw that only after a covenant with the people did David become king (2 Sm 5,3). Solomon succeeded David without this safeguard, but after his death the assembly of Israel demanded it again of Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12,4).

It was Solomon who began the transformation of traditional Israel. Jerusalem became an international centre under this merchant prince who took for his model the many-wived monarchs of the Gentiles. The bureaucracy of kingship became enormous, the royal lands extensive, taxes and other exactions exorbitant, and a proletariat was born. Formerly, a fairly even distribution of land, guaranteed and protected by law and custom, maintained the stability of this agricultural community. With the coming of commercialism, however, it was advantageous for the better-off to acquire larger fields, more vineyards and olive trees, and the number of owners correspondingly shrank. In store-cities like Solomon's, or in the granaries of other great landholders, grain could be held in speculation for sale at home or abroad, and prices could be fixed almost at will. The independent smallholder might find himself

wiped out through a single crop failure. He could seek a loan to recoup his losses, but he might find it temporarily more profitable to sell out to a large landowner who had the means and will to buy, ridding himself of future uncertainties and a burdensome taxation. When he did this, however, he swelled the number of the proletarian class which, in the cities or on the land, counted day by day more and more Israelites who were dependent on others for their livelihood.

Such were the mechanics of transition from a peasant to a commercial economy. In itself, there was nothing wrong with this transition. What was wrong were the antisocial attitudes to which it gave rise.

We have a most revealing glimpse of the change wrought by Solomon in what occurred after his death as related in 1 Kgs 12. Not yet had the idea of a controlled monarchy vanished from Israel: Rehoboam was expected to come to Ephraim's holy city to covenant with the people, "since all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king." There Ephraim presented its petition for the lightening of the burdens of kingship. The elders whose advice Rehoboam first sought had known the old ways of Israel, and they tried to persuade him to return to these ways. When their words failed to please the stupid young king, he turned to those who had never known anything but the effete life of Solomon's court, and received and followed the callous and insolent counsel that split the kingdom in twain.

Biblical history has been written mainly by men who possessed the Judahite point of view, and we speak Judahite language when we refer to the dissolution of the united kingdom as a schism in which Ephraim separated from Judah. To a northern Israelite of the time, the matter must have appeared in a vastly different light. From his point of view, Israel had merely rid itself of what had become a liability, despite the greatness that David had given Israel. Blessed with all the good farm lands and a geography favorable to foreign commerce, Ephraim could look down on Judah as the province of a relatively backward strain of poor relations.

Judah's little world of olive groves and sycamores and herdsmen put it, rather than Israel, outside the periphery of common tribal culture and development. Israel could well dispense with Judah and certainly—David aside—had never depended on it. On the other hand, it is without question that the bulk of Solomon's resources had been drawn from the toil and the soil of Israel.

The early history of the divided kingdoms supports this point of view. Israel fell heir to the close Phoenician contacts that had contributed so much to Solomon's magnificence. It controlled the trade routes that he had exploited, which bisected it north and south from Phoenicia to Arabia, and east and west from Mesopotamia to Carchemish and Egypt. During the early days of the dual kingship, the Bible does not conceal the fact of Israel's dominance.

But with the schism the Davidic peace had been shattered. Pharaoh Shishak of a hostile new Egyptian dynasty successfully raided both Israel and Judah and left a grandiose catalogue of his conquests on his temple wall at Karnak. Israel inherited from its conception and birth a tradition of dynastic warfare that was to be one of its chief curses during its entire history. None of its early kings was especially distinguished, and the royal office was a plaything for rival factions of the army until at length emerged victorious a man named Omri.

Omri was the real founder of the kingdom of Israel. The author of the Book of Kings, who had no use for any of the northern kings, dismisses him with a few lines on account of his religious sins; but from the standpoint of statecraft and shrewd administration (in which the author of Kings had no interest at all) there is no doubt that Omri and his son Ahab were two of Israel's most capable kings. So much did Omri impress himself on history, forever after the annals of the great kings of Assyria, who begin to enter into Israel's fortunes in the time of Ahab, referred to Israel as "the house of Omri," even when his dynasty had passed away. By a supreme irony, the man who put an end to the Omride kings is himself called in Assyrian records "the son of Omri."

Omri built Samaria, a splendid new capital on a militarily ideal

site; its constructions, the work of Omri and Ahab, are among the best discovered in Palestinian archeology. As might be expected, the city was subject to considerable Phoenician influence, which extends down to the beautiful ivory carvings, now in the British Museum, that won even the grudging notice of the author of Kings (1 Kgs 16,29 f.; 23,39). The alliance with Phoenicia was cemented by the marriage of Ahab with Jezebel, daughter of the Tyrian king Ethbaal. Israelite trade intensified under this alliance, and doubtless related to it was the rebuilding of Jericho under Hiel (1 Kgs 16,34); the Bible takes note of this last fact only as one of Ahab's impious works in fulfilling Joshua's curse, but it was probably a measure intended to protect Israelitic commerce in the Jordan Valley.

The display and magnificence of Solomon were thus reiterated under Omri and Ahab. A corollary was the reduplication of the seamier side of Solomon's administration. A precious insight into the everyday life of the times is afforded by 1 Kgs 21, the story of Naboth which we have already seen, which was included in the Bible because it supported the author's conviction that Ahab was a bad king and because it featured the prophet Elijah. The story is valuable for showing the importance set on private and family property by Israelites as well as the restrictions imposed by custom on even the will of the king, who in this instance was shown a way to circumvent them by his ruthless foreign wife. It also points up the acquisitiveness of the larger landowners, of whom the king was one; doubtless the story of Naboth was repeated, with variations, throughout the entire kingdom in this period, to supply the basis for the prophetic condemnation of corrupt officialdom that is one of the major curses of the age. Another revealing picture is found in the example of the widow in Zarephath (1 Kgs 17,10–16), who may be taken as typical of the starving widows and orphans whom Isaiah will be defending in a few short years.

After the time of Omri and Ahab (880–853 B.C.) there was a sharp decline in Israel's fortunes. The splendor of these kings had entailed constant warfare with Damascus over control of com-

merce and the trade routes, with now Samaria and now Damascus in the ascendancy. Under the remaining Omride kings things went from bad to worse, and soon Israel was completely subservient to the Aramean state. Moab, too, which had been firmly repressed by Omri, was now lost, and with it control of Transjordan trade. Mesha, the king of Moab (2 Kgs 3,4 f.), erected at Dibon the exultant victory stone we have already mentioned, on which he recorded his triumphant liberation of Moab and invasion of Israel. A new dynasty in Damascus, begun by a usurper named Hazael, prosecuted the war against Samaria with new vigor. Israel's response, as usual, was another change of dynasty through revolution. The last of the Omride kings was murdered by one of his generals. This general, Jehu, appears to have been faithful to Israel's best traditions in his fashion, which was a very ruthless fashion indeed, but he did not prove a successful king. He rallied to his cause, at least in the beginning, both the prophetic party and the reactionary Rechabites, and he savagely repressed the foreign influences that had been encouraged under Jezebel. But it is quite plain that the nation Israel suffered under his rule. The first notice we have of Israel in the annals of Assyria relates to Ahab, who in 853 at the battle of Qarqar (not mentioned in the Bible) put a respectable army in the field as his share in the alliance of states opposing the Assyrians' annual westward marches. The next notice, of Jehu, states that he was forced to buy immunity from the same Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III; and despite the manifest intention of the Assyrian inscription to make the least sound like the most, the tribute that Jehu could offer seems relatively pitiful. Jehu died with Israel under Aramean domination and straitened economically and territorially. Under his son Jehoahaz the situation became even more desperate.

It was now that a trick of fate gave Israel a new lease on life, when "Yahweh sent a savior to Israel" (2 Kgs 13,1–5). This "savior" was the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III, who in his own inscriptions styled himself "conqueror of Israel." By breaking the power of Damascus, Adad-nirari made possible a series of cam-

paigns in which the new Israelite king Jehoash regained control of the cities lost by Jehoahaz. This was to be the beginning of a *risorgimento* that reached its peak under Jeroboam II. Jeroboam restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the sea of the Arabah, that is, to their full extent, fulfilling the prophecy of an otherwise unknown prophet Jonah ben Amittai (2 Kgs 14,25). Once again, and as it happened, for the last time, Israel's star was in the ascendant.

And once again Israel proved to be bereft of the responsibility without which prosperity is a curse. Excavations in Palestine, particularly those carried out by the French Dominicans at Tell el-Far'ah (probably the biblical Tirzah, an earlier capital of the kingdom of Israel), have revealed the living conditions of the time, and the contrast between the lavish palaces of the rich and the hovels of the poor:

> The juxtaposition of rich and poor houses, which contrasts with the uniformity of the dwellings of the 10th century, reflects a social evolution—the birth of an urban proletariat. It is a concrete illustration of the invectives of the prophets of those days against the luxury of the houses which the rich built out of the money they had extorted from the poor.[1]

The excavation of Samaria has also confirmed the new surge of life under Jeroboam. The city is a picture of bustle and activity, with renewed trade and commercial relations, even with Babylon —but it is also true that the worst repair of its buildings must be dated in the same period, and something of the same can be verified of the other Israelite cities that have been examined. Samaria became wealthy, but the wealth was evidently concentrated in fewer hands than ever before, whose sense of civic duty was less than ever before.

[1] R. de Vaux, O.P., "The Excavations at Tell el-Far'ah and the Site of Ancient Tirzah," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 88 (1956), p. 134.

Such is the background to the mission of the prophet Amos, who now enters the scene.

2. THE PROPHET TAKEN FROM JUDAH

It has often caused remark that Amos who came from Tekoa, a village in Judah, should have addressed his prophecy to northern Israel rather than to Judah. We shall see later, it was not for lack of occasion to preach the same message at home. The question also occurred to Amos' contemporaries, as we see from the brief biographical account attached to his prophecy against the House of Jeroboam and the sanctuaries of Israel:

> Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam, king of Israel: "Amos conspires against you in the very house of Israel; the land can no longer bear what he says. For Amos says: 'Jeroboam will perish by the sword, and Israel shall be driven into exile far from its land.' " Then Amaziah said to Amos: "Begone from here, seer, flee to the land of Judah, there to eat your bread and play the prophet. But prophesy no more at Bethel, for it is a royal sanctuary, a temple of the kingdom" (7,10–13).

Amaziah, who was doubtless the chief priest of the royal sanctuary, spoke to Amos not only as one embarrassed by his attacks on the high and mighty of Israel, but as one who resented an invasion of his preserves. To him Amos was only a *nabi* like the many who grubbed out a living by devising oracles for clients. Why did he not ply this trade at home, rather than encroach on the business of the prophets of Bethel over whom Amaziah was set in charge?

Amos' reply we already know, the only explanation we shall ever have of his presence at Bethel. "No *nabi* I, nor son of *nabi*. I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamores, till Yahweh took me

from behind the flock and told me: 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel' " (verse 14 f.).

"Yahweh took me," said Amos. What lay behind this, what were its circumstances and preparation, we shall never know. It is only clear that the prophet had obtained an irresistible conviction of his mission to reveal God's will to the northern kingdom. He never doubted the rightness of this mission, nor that God truly spoke by his mouth.

The few words that Amos gives of his background have, in a way, been unfortunate for some students of his prophecy, who have never been able to forget that they are reading the speeches of a poor man denouncing the rich. Yet it is clear that Amos did not bring out his mean origins from any consciousness of social class; he was simply stating what he was, that he was not a professional *nabi*. Without question his humble status did sharpen his sensibilities to oppression, for it was the same kind of oppression that he may well have experienced personally. But he attacks the wicked rather than the wealthy. It has been noted that the word "wealth" occurs in the prophetic writings with extreme rarity (never once in Amos), which would hardly be the case had economic considerations been paramount in the prophets' minds. How often can the professional agitator refrain from apostrophizing the idle rich, who are also the filthy rich, or from dwelling on the evils of the "system"? Renan to the contrary, Amos was not the first of the muckrakers, but a man consumed with concern for the moral will of God.

At the same time, it is safe to say that Amos, like most of us, was what habit and wont had made him. If he was sent to attack evil where it was to be found, he was not dismayed to discover that it was to be found almost exclusively with the rich. His bitter sarcasm heaped on the carousings and carryings-on of the leisure class in their ivory palaces surely has a pungency that drew as much from his own poverty and privation as from his conviction of God's will. He has no tears to shed for those against whom the divine vengeance has been decreed.

There are prophets, like some Christian saints, who command our respect without exciting much of our fellow feeling. I rather imagine most of us would put Amos in such a category, since we find it hard to share his relentless single-mindedness. He is certainly one of the gloomiest of the prophets. So convinced is he that Israel the nation has gone down the path of sin beyond the point of recall, there is little room in his thought for the future hope on which other prophets love to dwell. His younger contemporary Hosea also prophesied in Israel when moral conditions were worse, if anything, than in the time of Amos. Yet Hosea's vision of Israel's salvation was clear and unclouded. Hosea had learnt Yahweh's mercy through anguish and suffering, but Amos had met his Semitic God in the desert where all colors are the same and absolute.

It is possible, but not likely, that Amos did preach in Judah as well as in Israel. The only place expressly singled out as the scene of his prophecies is Bethel, but the prophecies themselves suppose other locations as well. By the same token, although one critic at least has imagined that all the prophecies were uttered on one occasion, in them we probably have the records of a prophetic career of some duration, gathered in a roughly chronological order or in what a later editor thought was their order. Whoever wrote the prologue to the collection tried to date Amos for us when he put the beginning of his prophecies "two years before the earthquake" (1,1), presumably the earthquake to which Amos refers in 5,11. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing when this occurred, for earthquakes were fairly common in Palestine. Some have made it coincident, more or less, with the eclipse of the sun that the prophet seems to be describing in 8,9 (a total eclipse of the sun was visible in Palestine on 15 June 763 B.C.). But this is guesswork.

3. ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

The Book of Amos begins with a series of oracles against the nations surrounding Israel. Such oracles are common in all the prophetic books, but usually the editors have made them serve a quite

diverse purpose than they do in Amos. Ordinarily the prophets' oracles against Israel are placed first; then the oracles against the nations; and finally oracles promising salvation to Israel. This arrangement took cognizance of the nations as the instruments of Yahweh's punishment of his people, and also signified that Israel would be restored to peace and tranquillity after the destruction of its enemies. But in the Book of Amos, by exception, the oracles against the nations lead into the condemnation of Israel.

It is easy to believe that this order is Amos' own, especially as the position of these oracles cannot be altered without detriment to his message. Their internal unity, their repeated allusions to Israel, and their rhetorical and climactic character all argue that they are now what the prophet originally made of them.

We have no difficulty in reconstructing the scene. Amos has taken his stand on some elevation where he can survey the crowd, probably in the court of the Bethel sanctuary now choked with clients on a feast day. From his vantage point he takes careful note of those who have come to offer sacrifice and pay their tithes, each of whom is soon to feel the lash of his tongue. Here comes a notorious usurer, fat with the profits squeezed from a thousand hopeless debtors, scurrying to untaint his money by paying God his share. Here walks a local monopolist in grain trailing obsequious satellites, and there a landholder with properties newly enlarged by foreclosure, who owes his wealth to the labor of slaves sold for their debts to work land that was once theirs. In the background stand a few of the wives of the *nouveaux riches*, haughty of eye, jaded, elaborately bored, completely insulated from the currents of life that swirl about their dinner parties, their sumptuous homes, their carefully tended bodies. Amid these well-fed Israelites who are present to contribute their due to religion as all respectable people should, the shabby Judahite clothed in herdsman's garments seems from the first to be a contradiction. Then he raises his arms and begins to speak, and the people have him placed. He is a prophet.

The worshippers at Bethel are not unused to prophets and their sometimes unconventional ways. Amaziah has a full complement of

them on hand for whoever is desirous of a comforting word from Yahweh. They are well trained, these prophets of Amaziah. Never yet has one of them hinted that Yahweh has any interest in the private lives of those who throng his sanctuary, who are indeed God's own people, an island of salvation in a sea of infidelity. This prophet, too, despite his uncouth appearance and harsh Judahite accent, seems no different from the rest as he begins to predict the doom of Israel's neighbors. The people prepare to listen complacently. A preacher is at his best, after all, when he clearly puts God on the right side from the outset.

Amos began with the use of an ancient stereotyped figure which Israelite poets had long ago borrowed from the Canaanites, a numerical device indicating an indeterminate sum of counts at the author's disposal.

> Thus says Yahweh:
> For three of Damascus' transgressions, and for four,
> I have decided them irrevocably!
> For they have threshed Gilead with iron sledges . . . (1,3).

He was alluding to the cruelty perpetrated in warfare between the Arameans and the Transjordan Israelites, either quite recently in the defeats suffered by the new Damascene king Ben-Hadad III, or earlier, in the incursions of his father Hazael against Jehu. Meet that hated Damascus be condemned for its barbarity! The prediction that followed must have fired the national spirit of all the bystanders, as Amos listed the Aramean cities doomed to destruction:

> I shall cast fire upon the house of Hazael,
> and it will devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad;
> I shall smash the bars of Damascus,
> and destroy him who resides at Bikeath-Aven,
> and him who holds the sceptre at Beth-Eden,

and the people of Aram shall go captive to Kir, says Yahweh
(1,4 f.).

Aram would return to the legendary Kir whence it had come (9,7). To the remaining nations in his catalogue Amos applied the same formula, to Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, the countries to the south, north, and west of Israel. Philistia had "carried off a whole people into captivity, turning them over to Edom" (1,6), while Phoenicia, too, had "turned over a whole people captive to Edom, and has not remembered the brothers' covenant" (1,9). We do not know to what precise incident Amos made reference; the "whole people" might be a tribe, a clan, or a village. In Semitic eyes it was a terrible sight for any existing community to lose its identity entirely: witness the concern felt by Israel in the story of Jgs 21 regarding Benjamin's survival, even though its desperate straits were due to the needful discipline of the other tribes. Also, though the enslavement of war captives was, then as now, taken for granted, owners of slaves had a somewhat illogical aversion for the one who trafficked in slaves. The most heinous crime of all, however, was to violate a covenant.

The prophet's gaze now fell on Edom, the kingdom once subjugated by David, with which the Israelites recognized the kinship of common ancestry. This kinship had been scorned by Edomites willing to buy a "whole people" from Philistine and Phoenician freebooters. Edom "has pursued his brother with the sword and has stifled his compassion; he has treasured up his wrath forever, and his anger he has kept perpetually" (1,11). Ammon, too, he charged with an act of barbarity committed in its wars against the Transjordan Israelites: "They have ripped up the childing women of Gilead, that they might enlarge their borders" (1,13). This crime, ancient in Semitic annals and soon again to be a horror perpetrated by Israelite on Israelite (2 Kgs 15,16), had a peculiar viciousness from its motive: for the sake of a few more acres Ammon had slain the unborn.

Lastly Amos turned to Moab. With this country Israel had fought some of its bitterest battles, but this time it was not to be for this cause that its crimes were visited on its head. Moab's crime, in fact, we must see through the eyes of an eighth-century Israelite rather than our own: "They have burnt the bones of the king of Edom to lime" (2,1). Many commentators have made many attempts to "correct" this text, but it is perfectly comprehensible as it stands, even though we do not know to what event it refers. Yahweh condemned Edom for its inhumanity; he also condemned the inhumanity of which Edom was victim. In the Semitic hierarchy of evil, desecration of the bodies of the dead was set near the top.

Six nations had been passed in review, and Amos paused. Was there to be a seventh, holding that place of significance which Semites had always been taught to see in the number seven? There was to be a seventh, but first Amos allowed his hearers a moment's reflection on what he had said. Pleasant though they may have found it that the hated Gentiles were condemned one by one, they might have been the least bit surprised at the grounds of their condemnation. Amos had not pilloried them for any of the timeworn pagan vices that made the nations an unvarying scorn and derision to Israel, but for inhuman cruelty, for enslaving and obliterating a people, for the denial of compassion and the claims of brotherhood, for the subordination of human life to material gain, and for impiety and the profanation of human dignity.

Only then he spoke his seventh condemnation: Israel! Not only was Israel no better than the Gentiles, it was guilty of the selfsame sins. Too late did his audience spy the trap set for their hasty and eager acquiescence.

Thus says Yahweh:
For three of Israel's transgressions, and for four,
I have decided them irrevocably!
For they sell the just for money,
and the poor in consideration of a pair of shoes.

They afflict the lowly with bitterness,
and the way of the humble they turn aside.
A man and his father go in to the same girl,
just to profane my holy name.
On pledged garments they recline by every altar;
mulcted wine they drink in the house of their God (2,6–8).

Israel's crime was a social injustice that willingly sacrificed fellow Israelites to material ends. Yahweh's sanctuary was being desecrated by those who stood before Amos, whose deeds were so much more eloquent than their hymns of empty praise. The "girl" mentioned by Amos may be the temple prostitute who, Hosea tells us (4,14), had been introduced into Israelite shrines in imitation of Canaanite fertility rites; this is not entirely certain. At all events, Amos was revolted more at what Israel had done outside the sanctuary than in it. The poor man's cloak was his gage or token of a loan. Sacred custom demanded that it be returned to him at night for his covering (Ex 22,25 f.; Dt 24,12 f.), but the moneylenders of Bethel held it forfeit in defiance of Yahweh's will. Their ritual banquets were eaten from tables spread with the clothing of the poor, and were drunk in wine squeezed from the veins of the helpless.

The enormity that most impressed Amos was corruption in high places, specifically the perversion of the judicial processes through bribery. This vice was and has remained endemic in the Near East; it is evidenced in Israel's laws and by the testimony of prophets, wisdom writers, and psalmists alike. It was the judges, the tribal or royal officials who had the duty to carry out justice, who had sold the just for money, for "a pair of shoes" (which seems to have been an idiom for a bribe). In 6,12 Amos cries out again to these purchased men:

Can horses gallop over rock?
Do you plough the sea with an ox?

Yet you change right into bitterness,
and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.

"Right and righteousness" is one of those couplings beloved of Semitic language, something like the figure that the Greeks called hendiadys, two words expressing a single idea. These were the qualities Israel had learnt from Yahweh himself, and were of a consequence the indispensable constitution of the people that was Yahweh's creation. To pretend to go about the orderly business of running the state with sham justice was indeed to plough the sea with oxen.

What lay behind this parlous state of affairs we have partly seen. War, pestilence, and famine had all conspired to make life difficult for the poor. Once their precarious security was threatened, they were left to the mercy of the powerful. How much mercy the latter had shown, we now learn from Amos.

The landed aristocracy of Israel and the royal officials had become a class of privilege through Israel's commercial expansion; since the nation's barterable wealth consisted almost exclusively in the produce of the land, those who stood to gain from this expansion were the large landholders and the administrators of foreign trade. The commerce of a minor state like Israel could never mean great wealth for the entire country, but it could support a limited few in relative luxury. To spread its advantages too thin, the privileged might and doubtless did argue, would obviously benefit no one. Since it was infeasible that all should profit, why should not those who could do so? From this thinking rose the policy of monopoly of the means of production.

A modern reader might find such thinking both familiar and reasonable. By the same process, as a matter of fact, the last remnants of medieval society were wiped out in the wake of the agricultural and industrial revolutions of the past two centuries. The larger landholders then, enriched by the "enclosure" of common lands that had been designed to support a peasant economy, became the

capitalist class which found its proletariat ready-made in the dispossessed peasantry. Enclosure was justified by the argument, a true one, that the smallholders were both unwilling and unable to use the new farming methods that could increase production prodigiously. Like the nineteenth-century liberals, the monopolists of Israel could look on themselves as the progressive element of society that reckoned with a new age in which the ways of the simple past were no longer applicable. However, they could do this only by adopting an individualistic attitude to wealth that was opposed by every authentic Israelite custom and law.

Hence Amos' and the other prophets' bitter denunciations of the treason of Israel's rulers. As in the days when Naboth was deprived of his vineyard, only through the collusion of the administrators of justice could the builders of the new Israel cut across the network of law and custom that protected the smallholder and discouraged the concentration of wealth. The monarchy had made this possible, and it is in this fact that we have the explanation of an always latent hostility to monarchy on the part of the prophets. Up to the time of the monarchy, Israel had been a federation united by its covenant with Yahweh, and the law of the people—"civil" as well as "religious"—had been the law of the covenant. This is the law we find in the earliest sections of the Mosaic code in the Pentateuch, the so-called Book of the Covenant in Ex 20,22–23,19 which had governed Israel in the time of the Judges. With the coming of kingship, a new direction had been taken. Now people and king were united by covenant, and it was the responsibility of the king to govern by his own laws and ordinances. Yahweh remained a witness to this covenant, but the ancient covenant law now had only a religious sanction. It was the duty of the king and his officials to uphold the ancient traditions that had guaranteed dignity to every Israelite, but in practice Israel had come to be governed by laws quite alien to those on which the Israelitic commonwealth had been founded. As religion corrupted, the moral law of the covenant went unhonored. Thus the prophets' fundamental and constant appeal for true religion; it was the only way to restore Israel and to

right its wrongs. There was no constitution, no court of second instance to appeal to, save only Yahweh's ancient law.

This should give us a fresh insight into the tremendous task to which Amos and his successors set themselves, and the courage that the task required. Pitted against them were most of the forces of prestige in the land: the royal administration, the judiciary, the priesthood which Hosea will soon be denouncing for having ignored the law of God, and a great body of those who called themselves prophets of Yahweh. The party of "progress" had everything on its side except the prophets' indomitable conviction of the will of God.

Amos concentrates his attention on the rich and powerful rulers of Israel, therefore, not from any spirit of class warfare, but as laying at their doors responsibility for the destruction of the Israel God had made.

> Woe to them who change right into wormwood,
> who trample righteousness into the ground.
> In the gate they hate him who reproves:
> him who speaks sincerely they abhor.
> Therefore, because you oppress the lowly,
> and exact of him tributes of grain,
> houses of tooled stone will you build,
> but you shall not dwell in them;
> vineyards of great price will you plant,
> but you shall not drink their wine.
> For I know how many are your transgressions,
> and how great are your sins:
> persecutors of the just, takers of bribes,
> who turn aside the poor in the gate (5,7.10–12).

"In the gate," which corresponds to the English "from the bench," or "at the bar," specifies once more those to whom the prophet refers. "He who reproves" appears to have been a legal

term for a litigant. The bribes accepted by these venal judges were as often as not the price of acquitting the innocent, whose acquittal would have been a matter of course in honest courts. This was even more pernicious than the purchase of the courts by evil men, since the righteous were being forced to contribute to a system that destroyed them. In one way or the other, it was on the substance of the just poor that the judges had grown fat; their tributes were exacted in fines as well as in bribery, in usurious interest and ruinous taxation, and from the toil of the sharecroppers who worked their estates. We are reminded again that these were no magistrates of isolated village courts, but Israel's rulers, its merchant princes and great landowners. The "buyer" and the "seller" of the poor were very often one and the same.

4. THE VARIETIES OF INJUSTICE

We may readily surmise the reaction to the oracles Amos delivered at Bethel. It seems, however, that in this period a prophet was relatively safe from official persecution; partly from superstitious dread, partly from grudging admiration, he was permitted to say his piece. Years later, when a prophet like Jeremiah could spend a good deal of his time in detention or in active fear for his life from a ruthless king, men could point back to this eighth century when prophets had been allowed to preach without hindrance however unpleasant their words had been (Jer 26,18 f.). In Amos' encounter with Amaziah we do not see that the priest could do much more than bluster and complain petulantly to the king. Furthermore, we may imagine that like all really single-minded men who have set out frankly to get precisely what they want, the leaders of the new Israel were untouched by criticism that confined itself to mere words. A respect for public opinion they could indulge after their objective had been attained.

In Amos' collected prophecies there is here and there something for practically every type of shabby citizen who contributed to the antisocial spirit of the new Israel. The grasping merchant, me-

ticulous in his religion of empty ritual, is seen sarcastically as honoring his high feast days by interrupting his routine of dishonesty:

Hear this, you who afflict the poor,
trying to put an end to the humble in the land,
saying, "When will the new moon pass, that we may sell grain?
and the Sabbath, that we may open our wheat bins?
Making the *ephah* small and the *shekel* large,
deceiving with false scales,
buying the lowly for money,
and the poor in consideration of a pair of shoes,
we shall sell the very chaff of the grain!" (8,4–6).

Light measures and counterweights for selling, heavy ones for buying, outrageous prices charged for shoddy merchandise, have all frequented the markets of the world since man began to trade. Amos, however, certainly has more in mind here than such petty thievery. These men, he says literally, with perhaps a deliberate play on words, are "trying to make a Sabbath of the humble in the land." They are not mere shopkeepers but the merchant princes who have it in their power to control prices as they please and who can decide whether chaff will be sold for wheat. It is they who have "bought" the poor with the help of rapacious judges.

It was not only that Israel the nation was decaying through too much good living. The frugal rustic from Judah surely did believe this to be the case as his unsympathetic eye fell on the palatial homes of the wealthy in Bethel and Samaria. But what he saw clearly and first of all was the human pain and anguish that had built these homes and made the good life possible for those who inhabited them.

Proclaim it unto the palaces of Assyria,
unto the palaces of the land of Egypt;

and say: "Assemble on Mount Samaria,
and see the great disorders in her midst,
and the oppressions that are within her.
They know not rightdoing—the oracle of Yahweh—
who treasure up violence and destruction in their palaces.
Therefore—thus says the Lord Yahweh—
an enemy shall encompass the land,
cast down your strong places from you,
and pillage your palaces" (3,9–11).

For this reason the Gentiles are invited to spoil Israel; for this reason is its luxury damnable. Even ill-gotten gains could be put to productive use, but Israel cannot plead even this extenuation of its crimes.

Woe to them that are without care on Zion,[2]
who are confident on Mount Samaria,
marked out as the chief of the nations,
and like gods in the house of Israel!
Pass over to Calneh and see;
go thence to Hamath the great,
journey down to Gath of the Philistines:
Surely they were finer than these your kingdoms?
their borders were greater than your borders?
You who would put the evil day far from you,
who give yourselves up to wicked repose!
Lying on ivory couches,
they stretch themselves out on their beds;
they eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from within the stall;

[2] This line may have originally made reference to northern Israel; it could have been changed when Amos' prophecies were later used in Judah. It is equally possible, however, that Amos himself condemned Jerusalem along with Samaria.

they croon to the sound of the harp:
agents of song they would make for themselves like David;
they drink wine from chalices,
anoint themselves with the finest oil,
and grieve not over the ruin of Joseph (6,1–6).

Here is prophetic commentary on data to which archeology offers only neutral testimony. The Samaritan ivory work which we have mentioned above has been reproduced and admired in countless books of history; for Amos it had no beauty, for it was covered with blood. Also discovered in the ruins of Samaria, and from the time of Jeroboam II, were numerous inscriptions on ostraca, apparently counters used in gathering the royal tribute.[3] The ostraca often carry almost the very words used by Amos in his rejection of the sybaritic indolence of the Samaritans, docketing "a jar of fine oil" or "a jar of old wine." Amos obviously has no use for the idle rich. But again, it is not only their parasitical existence that revolts him, not only for this cause does he hold up to them the example of other proud cities whose wealth had stood them in no stead on the day of retribution from their enemies. The luxury of Samaria is a "wicked repose," more literally, "repose gained by violence." Therefore is it an outrage that Samaria can live not only well, but beyond all care.

Amos' expression, "the ruin of Joseph," is pregnant with meaning. Here he does not mean the coming invasion of the Assyrians which is to be Yahweh's inexorable response to Israel's sins. The invasion and destruction to follow will be only a confirmation of what has already taken place. In Amos' view Israel already lies in ruin, for all that once made Israel has disappeared.

In one of the best known doom-poems in prophetic literature,

[3] These ostraca also cast some light on the state of religion in Israel. The personal names they bear are about equally divided between those of Yahwistic and Baalistic origin.

the prophet turns his attention to the rich women of the capital city:

> Hear this word!
> Bashan cows of Mount Samaria,
> oppressing the lowly, crushing the poor;
> who say to their lords,
> "Bring, that we may drink!"
> The Lord Yahweh has sworn by his holiness:
> Behold, the days shall come upon you
> when they will drag you away with hooks,
> the very last of you with fishhooks.
> Through breaches you will go out, each straight ahead;
> you shall be driven to Hermon—the oracle of Yahweh
> (4,1–3).

These women inhabited the palatial homes, the summer and winter houses (3,15); they were the quintessence of the ones without care, the confident and heedless, the new society that had crowded out the old Israel. They were as a consequence perfect examples of the wealthy whose crime is not to be wealthy but to be unconcerned how and why. They had laid no finger on the poor; they would have disdained to. Not for them were the sordid details they had no wish to learn, of bribed officials and false weights and unfit grain. They had merely grown fat on the plunder of the poor, taking their estate for granted and always wanting more, harrying their husbands to fresh acts of social injustice—their slavish, unmanly husbands whom the prophet with fine irony styles their "lords."

All of these Amos sarcastically bids to continue to heap up their transgressions by their repeated sacrifices and vain observances at Bethel (4,4 f.). There is a point beyond which cant and hypocrisy cease to disgust, and merely fascinate.

5. THE NATURE OF RELIGION

If Amos despised the religion of Bethel, it was out of no quarrel with rites and forms, but from his knowledge of the just God who was the pretended object of this worship.

Pursue good, and not evil,
that you may live:
then Yahweh God of Hosts will truly be with you,
even as you say.
Hate evil and love good,
establish right in the gate:
perhaps Yahweh God of Hosts
may have mercy on the remnant of Joseph (5,14 f.).
I hate, I despise your feasts,
I will not savor the aroma of your solemnities;
when you offer me holocausts and sacrifices I will not accept them,
and the peace-offering of your fatlings I shall spurn.
Take away from me the sound of your songs,
I shall not listen to the plucking of your harps.
But let right flow like water,
and righteousness like a never-failing *wadi!* (5,21–24).

Here there is no rejection of traditional formulas, only a demand that they have some meaning. It is well to note Amos' "perhaps" with which he qualifies his reference to the "remnant" of Joseph. The doctrine of the remnant appears here for the first time in the Bible, but Amos' casual use of the term assures us that it had long existed in Israel. The remnant is the Israel of faith. Contrary to the amoral idea of the votaries of Bethel, the better spirits of Israel knew that Yahweh's salvation was only for those whose deeds proved them to be really his people. To the faithful remnant, there-

fore, the prophets addressed their appeal for conversion. Other prophets whose view of the future is more optimistic than Amos' will do more to exploit this idea. Amos is so convinced of Israel's certain doom, salvation has become for him only a wan hope. He knows that Yahweh's punishments are medicinal (4,12), that he would prefer to spare rather than to destroy (7,1–3); hence he can hope. Nevertheless, for Amos the remnant remains a perhaps.

However, he cannot be accused of ignoring the perhaps. He teaches plainly enough the way to salvation, to a share in the remnant of Israel, which is right and righteousness, the indispensable service of God. Lack of these has made Israel's vain sacrifices not merely otiose, but vile.

The will of Amos' God is incontestable, but not arbitrary; it is just, holy, and good. To accept this is to recognize the personal dignity of those to whom Yahweh has made known his will.

For the righteousness that is Yahweh's will is the very constituent of society; to resist it is not just to sin against a precept, but to disturb the nature of things, to attempt a contradiction (6,12). It is to profane the holy (2,7), which is God himself (4,2). If the justice with which every man is treated is of the very order of creation, and of the very nature of God, man has a dignity that is not attached to him by fiat but is intrinsic. To acknowledge this was true religion.

6. ELECTION AND UNIVERSALISM

What I have just said was certainly sensed by Amos, if it was not said. However, we should do Amos a disservice and receive none of his thanks, did we center his morality on man rather than on God. He was neither a philosopher nor an ethicist, but a prophet of Yahweh. He preaches a morality that corresponds to reason, but which draws its force and motivation not from natural facts but from the revealed word of God delivered to his people. Israelites were required to deal justly with one another because of Israel's elect status as Yahweh's chosen.

In insisting on the doctrine of election Amos entered dangerous ground, even as Hosea did when he described Israel's relation to Yahweh in terms of a sacred marriage. It was election, one of Israel's oldest and most deeply felt convictions, that had occasioned the complacency of Samaria and Bethel. In the popular mind it had been too easily assimilated to the Canaanite covenants with Baal, that is, the deity's guarantee of automatic protection in return for an equally automatic cult of honor. Nevertheless, Amos did not minimize the fact of election, but insisted on its true meaning. Israel had been made a people through Yahweh's choice, through his liberation of it from Egypt, his bestowal of the promised land, and his abiding presence. If Israel was faithless to the obligations entailed in all this, it was not only guilty of grievous sin but had actually ceased to be.

He introduces the theme of election in the reproach that concludes the first catalogue of Israel's sins:

> And I, I destroyed the Amorite before them,
> whose height was like the height of cedars,
> and who was as strong as oaks;
> I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below.
> And I, I brought you up out of the land of Egypt,
> leading you in the desert for forty years,
> to possess the land of the Amorite.
> I raised up prophets from your sons, Nazirites from your youths.
> Or is this not so, you Israelites?—oracle of Yahweh.
> You have given the Nazirites wine to drink,
> and on the prophets you have laid this charge:
> "Prophesy not!" (2,9–12).

Israel's sin was base ingratitude, and more, the repudiation of a call to greatness. The highest of Yahweh's favors was not the destruction of the Canaanite but the gift of his presence. Prophets

there had been to reveal his mind, and Nazirites (Nm 6,2–21; Jgs 13,14; 1 Sm 1,11) had been separated from the profane and consecrated to God, to live the challenge that should be constant for Yahweh's people, for them to draw near his holiness and avoid the contamination of the Gentile. But this people was not only incorrigible, it could only soil and profane. It could abide neither Yahweh's voice nor his holiness; it had stilled the one and profaned the other. It had renounced its own destiny. Therefore,

> Hear this word which Yahweh pronounces on you, Israelites,
> on the whole family that I brought up from the land of
> Egypt:
> Only you have I known from all the families of the earth,
> hence I visit on you all your iniquities (3,1 f.).

If Yahweh had chosen Israel, the consequence for Israel was that it should seek the holiness proper to a people consecrated to him. Because Israel had not done this, but instead had defiled and destroyed itself, the greater would be its punishment. Whatever Yahweh's title to punish the Gentiles, his title against Israel was clear and obvious.

Amos' idea of the covenant, therefore, was very different from the notion of his cheerful contemporaries, who could not dream that Yahweh might intervene in history save to their advantage.

> Woe to them who yearn for the day of Yahweh.
> What will this be to you, the day of Yahweh?
> It will be darkness, and not light! (5,18).

The "day of Yahweh" is another of those beliefs older than the prophets, to which Amos refers, as to the "remnant," as needing no explanation. It was to be the day of Yahweh's intervention, his settling of accounts. Faithful Israelites could only yearn for such a

day, when the people of God would be vindicated along with Yahweh himself. But the Israel to which Amos was speaking was no longer the people of God. If Yahweh is to take vengeance on his enemies, what will he not do to that people that had become his greatest enemy, that had rejected him not unknowingly but in the full light of knowledge? In keeping with his minimal view of the remnant, Amos' expectation of the day of Yahweh is entirely pessimistic.

It is part of his psychology not to describe the relation between Yahweh and Israel as a covenant. This does not mean, as some critics tried to maintain, that the term is of more recent coinage than his times; rather, it reflects his studied effort to set Israel straight in regard to its prerogatives. The prevalence of the Canaanite idea of covenant, in which the gratuitous act of God's mercy had been transformed into a contractual arrangement of strict *quid pro quo*, was reason enough to avoid the word. The election of Israel had nothing in common with other peoples' choice of a national god. Yahweh had chosen Israel, had known Israel out of all the families of the earth. Other nations Yahweh ruled, other nations he even favored, other nations he would judge, but only Israel had he known. This "know" is Amos' theology of the covenant. It means election and designation as in Jer 1,5 and Hos 13,5; and it anticipates later texts like Dt 7,6; 14,2, where the obligation of holiness is seen as the consequence of Yahweh's choice. That Yahweh had known Israel and Israel alone was alike Israel's glory and its supreme source of duty.

As we saw in 1,9, to Amos brotherhood is the correlative of covenant. It was Israel the people, as one of the families of the earth, that Yahweh had chosen. The tie by which he bound Israel to himself was therefore a tie that should have united Israelites more firmly, adding to all natural bonds that of common membership in Yahweh's family. Here was all the motive needed for a social morality proof against any economic or political change. It ought to have kept Israelites united in brotherhood, conscious of the mercy the strong must show the weak even as Yahweh had shown it to Israel.

It ought to have preserved right and righteousness in a commonwealth where no one might be foolishly rich while his brother was miserably poor.

In view of this exclusively Israel-centred morality that Amos preached, it is interesting to reflect that he is nevertheless altogether universalistic in his outlook. In his oracles against the foreign nations Yahweh is the God of all mankind who visits on all peoples their crimes even as on Israel. He offers no explanation of how the Gentiles were to be presumed aware of their duties to Yahweh's moral law; he had no reason to, for his prophecy was not addressed to Philistines or Moabites, but to Israel. But we have no doubt that he thought of these duties as real, since otherwise his equation of Israel to the nations would have been meaningless.

The election of Israel did not exclude a universal morality, it supposed it. This is the meaning of one of his most important revelations to Israel:

> Are you not like the Kushites to me,
> you Israelites?—oracle of Yahweh.
> Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,
> and the Philistines from Caphtor,
> and the Arameans from Kir? (9,7).

Amos does not reject the doctrine of election, but he defines what is distinctive about it. Simply as an exercise of Yahweh's universal power, Israel's Exodus from Egypt was no different from the migrations of other nations that were also made at his leave or call. What distinguished Israel Amos has already said: because Yahweh had known only Israel, the Exodus had a meaning of which the Ethiopians, the Philistines, or the Syrians were ignorant in their own movings and comings. Only Israel had he known, and to Israel alone had he made himself known. He could as easily have chosen any other people. Israel's election, in other words, figures an ideal relation of Yahweh to all mankind. When Amos extends

the morality of Israel's law to the other nations, the extension is legitimate. The imperatives spoken to Israel are universally valid, even for those who know them not, for they are from the one God of all.

Thus when Amos proclaims the end of the divine sufferance of Israel:

> So shall I do unto you, O Israel,
> for I shall indeed do it to you:
> Prepare to meet your God, O Israel! (4,12),

he voices a condemnation that falls on all who dare to transgress the moral laws taught by Israel's faith. The Yahweh of Amos' visions, seen in the locust plague (7,1–3), the drought (7,4–6), and the plumb line (7,7–9), is a God of long-suffering; he is, nevertheless, a God whose patience can come to an end, as is seen in the vision of the basket of fruit (8,1–3). Throughout he is the God of Israel calling his people to judgment; but he is also the God of the temple vision, whose omnipotence and transcendence cannot be confined:

> If they force their way into Sheol,
> my hand shall draw them thence,
> and if they mount up to the heavens,
> thence shall I draw them down.
> If they would hide on the peak of Carmel,
> thence shall I seek them out and seize them.
> If they would conceal themselves from my eyes at the bottom of the sea,
> thence shall I command the Serpent to bite them.
> And if they go into captivity before their enemies,
> thence shall I command the sword to slaughter them.
> I shall fix my eye upon them,
> for evil, and not for good (9,1–4).

CHAPTER FIVE

Hosea ben Beeri

A NOTE ON THE TEXT OF HOSEA'S PROPHECIES

Like the collection of Amos' prophecies, Hosea's is the work of an editor. Following the title (1,1), the book falls into two sections, cc. 1–3 and cc. 4–14, each with its own distinct problems and difficulties.

The first three chapters are biographical. To be more accurate, only c. 1 is biographical, a story told of the prophet by some other inspired writer, while the short third chapter is autobiographical. Between these is c. 2, consisting entirely of words of Yahweh.

Possibly no other prophetic passage has been so widely discussed, and with such contradictory conclusions, as these first three chapters. In the pages that follow I adopt the conclusion that most attracts me, without being able to do more than acknowledge that other conclusions are possible. The CCD version puts 2,1–3 after c. 3, where they seem to fit much better. These verses, along with 2,23–25, are often considered to be later additions to the text, not merely because they predict salvation (for Hosea does not have Amos' uncompromising viewpoint), but because they seem to predict it in a somewhat different manner than Hosea's. Also, they seem to suppose a later period (cf. 2,2), after both Israel and Judah had been conquered.

The remaining cc. 4–14 contain Hosea's prophecies in no very

apparent order, from the different periods of his ministry. If there is a principle of arrangement, the first half of the section seems to concentrate on the rebuke of present sins, while the second half reflects on the crimes of the past. Many critics formerly denied the Hoseanic authorship of parts of this collection, either on the aprioristic score that pre-exilic prophets were not concerned with preaching salvation, or on the assumption that Hosea was not specifically concerned with Judah. Today, however, hardly anyone would refuse to accept the entire text as Hosea's, with the exception of isolated words or verses here and there that can be recognized more or less readily as editorial work.

The Book of Hosea has the distinction of being probably the most poorly preserved of all the texts of the Hebrew Bible. As a result, more than the usual amount of conjecture has to be exercised in attempting to restore it to its original state, and translations will consequently sometimes differ widely.

1. HOSEA IN HIS AGE

Hosea was in all likelihood the younger contemporary of Amos, who, we saw, prophesied sometime in the second half of the reign of Jeroboam II. If we were to take the title of Hosea at its face value, we should have to conclude that the prophet was still active well after the sack of Samaria and the collapse of the northern kingdom, which occurred in 722 B.C. in fulfilment of his and Amos' predictions. Most students of the Old Testament do not believe that the title is wholly accurate. The symbolic unit of cc. 1–3 can be put definitely within the last years of Jeroboam II; it foresees the end of the dynasty of Jehu, which was destroyed in the anarchy that followed on Jeroboam's death in 753. Other parts of Hosea's prophecy seem to allude at various times to the civil disorders of this period, corresponding to what is described in 2 Kgs 15–17. The transition from Shallum to the reign of Menahem (752–742) may be referred to in 8,9 f.; and 5,8–6,6 is now commonly regarded as a contemporary commentary on the war be-

tween Judah and the league formed by Aram and Israel (2 Kgs 16,5–9). The sequel to this war was the devastation of Transjordanian Gilead by the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III in 732. It has been argued that Hosea would hardly have spoken as he has in 6,8 and 12,12 (of a wicked Gilead inviting punishment) if he had already witnessed this judgment of God executed on Transjordan. On the other hand, he habitually calls Israel "Ephraim," and it was only the highlands of Ephraim that actually remained to Israel after Tiglath-pileser had overrun both Gilead and Galilee. Probably we must conclude that while Hosea did not outlive the northern kingdom he witnessed the beginning of its certain end.

That he was a native of the north seems evident enough. Nothing to the contrary is ever stated, and in 7,5 (which is admittedly hard to interpret) he apparently identifies himself with the north. His concern is almost exclusively with northern, not southern sites; the former are frequently named, while Jerusalem is never mentioned. The south does occasionally enter his purview, however. After the fall of the northern kingdom Hosea's collected prophecies were used in the south, and in some cases they have been accommodated by the substitution of Judah's name for Ephraim's, in which form they have come down to us.

There has been much conjecture about Hosea's personality, but it must be frankly admitted that we know very little about him apart from the name of his otherwise unknown father. If some have believed him to be a priest, this is far from a certainty; if his geographical allusions suggest that he was a Benjaminite, this is only a guess; if his apparent acquaintance at first hand with political intrigue would point him out as a member of the upper or wealthy classes, this is only a possible inference. Our knowledge of him extends no farther than what we can deduce from the (probably) biographical section in cc. 1–3 and such other self-revelation as he has permitted throughout his prophecies.

We have much more information about Hosea's times. His prophecy reflects the social and political changes that had taken place in Israel since Amos uttered his oracles in the heyday of the

material prosperity and self-sufficiency of Jeroboam's reign. How really insecure Jeroboam's state had been was effectively demonstrated in the fate of his dynasty once his strong hand was removed, and in the dissolute tendencies of the kingdom which the circumstances of external politics helped manifest. His son Zechariah was to reign but six months; in 752 he was murdered by Shallum ben Jabesh, who supplanted him on the throne (2 Kgs 15,8.10; by some, Hos 7,5 ff. is thought to refer to this change of dynasty). Only a month later Shallum himself was killed by the pro-Assyrian Menahem who established Israel's final dynasty, holding the throne a full ten years and leaving his son Pekahiah as successor (2 Kgs 15,14.17.22). Throughout this time part of the nation's ruling classes was bidding for the support of Egypt while another part was all for casting in its lot with Assyria (Hos 7,11), and the whole country was thrown into confusion with consequent full sway given to brigandage (Hos 6,7–7,4).

This history of Israel's latter days is complicated by the westward march of the Assyrian empire, the rivalry of Egypt and Assyria, and the proclivity of Israelite kings for dabbling in Near Eastern power politics, an exploit for which, as the event proved, their taste far exceeded their talent.

The Assyrians have often been compared with the modern Germans—not the *Wissenschaft* Germans, but the *Wehrmacht* Germans. Their early origins are little known, and are of no concern to us here. Before the Hebrew patriarchs ever entered Canaan, however, these Eastern Semites had already formed an extensive empire about the city of Ashur that gave them their name. After a decline during which Babylon had ruled the land between the rivers, the Assyrian kingdom had revived, about the same time as the Israelite conquest of Canaan. It was then that the Assyrian capital had become Nineveh, which to the Old Testament is the epitome of a great world city. The new Assyrian empire, however, is the one that affects biblical history. This was the political organism constructed by Adad-nirari II (911–890) and tooled into a ruthless and deadly military machine by Ashurnasirpal II (883–

859), who made Assyrian cruelty a byword. From this time on the people of Israel were in constant contact with Assyria, as the course of its empire moved steadily to the west.

Both Ahab and Jehu, we have seen, are named in the annals of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. At Qarqar in 853 Ahab had furnished a complement of chariots and troops to assist the alliance of several states, mostly Aramean, which resisted the onward march of the Assyrians. This coalition probably achieved its purpose of making Shalmaneser's further progress not worth the while; the Assyrian marches in those days were essentially raiding parties bent on plunder rather than subjugation. Even a more successful Shalmaneser who conquered Jehu had been content to accept tribute and submission—the latter graphically portrayed on the famous "black obelisk" in the British Museum, on which the Assyrian artist carved the figure of Jehu kissing the ground before Shalmaneser's feet—but he had left Jehu master of Israel with Israel uninvaded. But with the conquest of Aram by Adad-nirari III the warning was now out that Israel's own territory was in danger.

Amos had foreseen the Assyrian invasion as the punishment of Israel's crimes. In Hosea's day this prescience was to become a certainty. Opportunists as well as any prophet could now read the signs of the times. For the prophets, Israel's only recourse was that of repentance—and Amos, for one, was not sure that even this would avail. For the practical-minded men of Israel, however, two other possibilities were open. One was to anticipate the inevitable by alliance with Assyria, while the other was to join with Egypt, Assyria's mortal enemy, the only other Near Eastern power strong enough to be its rival. As far as the prophets were concerned, to adopt either of these measures was to fail to see the real problem, and, in fact, to compound it, by deserting Yahweh for an illusory human protection.

The plot and counterplot that encompassed the fall of Jehu's and Jeroboam's dynasty were the fruits of this practical politics condemned by the prophets. Menahem's emergence as king was a

victory for the pro-Assyrians. According to 2 Kgs 15,19 f. he paid a heavy tribute to "Pul the king of Assyria" to secure himself as king of Israel and avoid the devastation of his country. Babylonian documents have confirmed that the name "Pul" was taken by Tiglath-pileser III as a throne name after his conquest of Babylon in 729. The tribute paid by Menahem, exacted by him from the wealthy men of Israel, may be alluded to in Hos 8,9 f.; it is mentioned, certainly, in Tiglath-pileser's own annals.

Menahem thus became a vassal of Assyria, but he remained an autonomous king within these limits. The pro-Egyptian factions in Israel did not, of course, die with his accession. After his death they made their last effort to resist Assyria by force of arms, achieving a temporary victory that ended in Israel's total destruction. Menahem's son Pekahiah was murdered by one of these factions, which had at its head a man named Pekah.

Under Pekah's rule came the attempted invasion of Judah that is generally called the Syro-Ephramite war, that is, the war between Judah and the coalition of Damascus with Israel. As this war is much more significant for Judah and the Judahite prophets than for Hosea, we shall see something of it later on. The invasion was apparently part of a much larger effort, to weld Judah and Israel, together with Damascus, Phoenicia, and Philistia, into a force capable of resisting Assyria and making it unprofitable for the Assyrian king to continue his conquests in the west. Between 734–732 Tiglath-pileser utterly annihilated the coalition, bit by bit, and at the end of his campaigns Israel had left to itself only the highlands of Ephraim, having lost both Galilee and Transjordan. Inevitably Pekah was assassinated, and a king friendly to Assyria replaced him. Doubtless sometime during this period, as was suggested above, the prophet Hosea completed his ministry in Israel.

The king who replaced Pekah, and who was the last of the Israelite kings, bore the name Hoshea. He was at first content with the lot he had inherited, to rule as Assyria's vassal. But in 727 Tiglath-pileser died, and his son succeeded as Shalmaneser V. A

change of kings was always a signal for subject states to try for independence, since the military machine was inevitably disrupted for a time when deprived of its chief general, who was the king himself. The pro-Egyptian faction in Israel once more exerted its influence. The Bible speaks of an alliance between Hoshea and "So the king of Egypt" (2 Kgs 17,4) and notes that this was coincident with Hoshea's refusal to pay tribute to Assyria. Assyrian texts have with fair probability identified Hoshea's Egyptian ally with a certain Sibe, an Egyptian general who commanded forces in the Delta and was possibly a prince or pretender to the Egyptian throne. Shalmaneser's reply to Hoshea's rebellion was to return to Palestine, imprison the king, and lay siege to Samaria.

The siege of the capital city lasted three years; Omri had built it well. But in 722 it capitulated, bringing the northern kingdom to an end. Shalmaneser had died meanwhile, and it was a new king, Sargon II, who became the conqueror of Samaria. Two years later he crushed a last-ditch revolt of several Aramean and Israelite cities which met him in the field at Qarqar. However, to all practical purposes Israel ceased to be when the proud city of Samaria fell.

The fall of Samaria realized all the dire predictions Amos and Hosea had made as the consequence of Israel's crimes. The Assyrian policy in conquest was to exchange the influential members of conquered populations one with another, thereby lessening the possibility of future nationalistic uprisings by removing potential leadership. Accordingly, many Israelites were transported to other parts of the Assyrian empire, and in their place people of other nations were brought in. This shifting of the population continued under Sargon's successors Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (Ezr 4,2.9 f.). It is what is meant by the "exile" of the northern tribes. Doubtless the bulk of the northern population remained Israelite, as before. But they were now Israelites without an Israel; as the biblical author put it, "Yahweh removed Israel from his sight, as he had foretold by all his servants the prophets" (2 Kgs 17,23). Never again did the kingdom revive, and the exiles remained the "lost tribes" forever.

This is the melancholy chronicle supposed in the prophecies of

Hosea, who confirms what we would already suspect, that Israel's fluctuations indicated a degeneration of its national and religious spirit. This history, most of which Hosea lived to see, prepares us for the fact that he is more concerned with the proximate fate of Israel the nation than with specific Israelites, as Amos had been. While Amos saw clearly that the violation of Yahweh's justice had already destroyed Israel from within, and was merciless in castigating the pride and arrogance that tried to be oblivious to this, Hosea was actually witnessing the dissolution that was the result. There are other differences between the two prophets, of course. One of these, the major one in fact, we must now try to see, to the extent that we can.

2. GOMER AND ISRAEL

In taking up the first three chapters of Hosea's prophecy it is necessary to adopt an hypothesis—rather, it is necessary to adopt a whole series of them. Do these chapters form a unity? Do they tell a consecutive story? If so, what is the story? Is it history, or is it allegory? All these questions may be answered in many ways. All that I can do here is make to each of them the answer that I personally believe, and indicate briefly why I believe it. I cannot discuss the many other possibilities that I consider less probable. Since on these answers hinges our basic approach to Hosea's life and character, and consequently our understanding of his prophetic message, it is a pity that they must be hypothetical.

I believe, first of all, that while these chapters are obviously allegorical, they are also historical. That is, they correspond to the brief biographical section we saw in Am 7, and which we shall see again in Is 6 and Jer 1: they make up an account of the prophet's vocation from Yahweh. Though their literary unity is artificial and editorial, they did from the beginning describe the same life situation. The first chapter which begins the story is ultimately dependent on the prophet, who interpreted the event in the light of divine command; c. 3, the prophet's own first-person account, evidently refers to a later stage of the event; and c. 2 contains further

prophetic revelation which underlined the event's significance for Hosea.

As I suggested in the note at the beginning of this chapter, both 2,1–3 and 2,23–25 are better taken as additions to the text by a later writer who was inspired to imitate Hosea and enlarge on him. Anyone reading these verses attentively will see that while they repeat the substance of Hosea's prediction of future salvation and use his own words cleverly, they also say some things Hosea would have been unlikely to say. In 2,24 Jezreel means Israel, and in 2,2 it means a reunited Israel and Judah. This use is in rather sharp contrast to the symbolic meaning which Hosea otherwise attaches to Jezreel, and it is improbable that the prophet himself would have introduced the contrast. The verses appear to be from a time when both Israel and Judah had been conquered and exiled. They are beautiful texts, but probably not Hosea's.

What, then, is the story that these chapters tell, as they originally told it?

Yahweh said to Hosea: "Go, take to yourself a harlot wife, and harlot children, for the land commits harlotry, turning away from Yahweh" (1,2). We read here the prophetic understanding of an event that may have come only by degrees and through agonizing meditation. Hosea did not necessarily understand Yahweh's intentions at the time of his marriage, nor was the woman he married necessarily known to him then as a harlot. Rather, it is more likely that his call to prophecy came through this experience and did not precede it. In the tragedy of his own life was mirrored for him the tragedy experienced by Yahweh in his choice of Israel. Who had once been a fair spouse to him had in the end proved a faithless wife.

This is one of the reasons that make me believe the story is historical and not pure symbolism. There was revealed to Hosea a thing hardly perceived by Amos: the pain it cost Yahweh to repudiate his beloved Israel. Hosea has probed into the love of God as deeply as any man ever did before or after him. So penetrated is his prophecy with insight into the divine feeling toward Israel the

faithless spouse, it is hard to believe it was not learnt through personal experience.

Gomer herself, the daughter of Diblaim, is another reason to think this the real story of Hosea's life. There seems to be no symbolism in these names. The names of the children born to her and Hosea are symbolic, it is true. But only the names are symbolic, not the children themselves: that there were two sons and a daughter appears to be a fact taken from life. Probably the names given in the text were not, in fact, the actual ones borne by Hosea's children, but are his further adaptation of the life situation to the symbolized reality.

This symbolism, which has come into the New Testament, has become a commonplace for us. But it was new in Israelite literature, and as I mentioned above, it required a bit of daring for Hosea to use it. The Israel of his day, as we have already seen, was corrupted by its contact with the fertility ritual of Canaan, and Yahweh was often confused by unthinking Israelites with the agricultural deity Baal. The fertility ritual was one of sympathetic magic, in which the *qedeshoth*, "holy women," functioned as surrogates of the deity, prostituting themselves to effect the fertility of the soil. With this unsavory connotation of dread and unholy rites, the idea of "sacred marriage" would have been shunned by any spirit more timid than Hosea's as too dangerous a metaphor to set before Israelites in the name of Yahwistic religion. Ideas, however, as Hosea certainly knew, are effectively countered only by the generation of other ideas, not by the deceptively simple expedient of inhibiting thought. The worship of the local Baals had perverted a noble truth which must on no account be suppressed because of its evil associations.

If Gomer is Israel, the unfaithful spouse of Yahweh, her children are the faithless Israelites. Thus Hosea records Yahweh's words at the birth of his first child:

Call his name Jezreel, for in a little while
I shall visit the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu:

I shall bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.
And it shall be on that day,
I shall break Israel's bow in the valley of Jezreel (1,4).

Hosea predicts the speedy fall of the dynasty of Jeroboam II. Eye for eye and tooth for tooth: for the blood shed by Jehu in establishing his dynasty a century earlier (2 Kgs 9 f.), only blood can repay. The valley of Jezreel, scene of so many of Israel's victories and of Jehu's conquest, is here a symbol of defeat. The prophet obviously holds in horror the Jehu story which in the ancient source used by the Book of Kings was reported with no apparent disapproval. It was one thing, of course, to excuse even ruthless and brutal acts that had put an end to a bad dynasty in the hope of a better one; it was another thing to look back, as Hosea did, on a history that had proved the new dynasty to be worse than the one it had replaced.

The story continues, for Yahweh's grievance against Israel is not confined to the bloody deeds of Jehu. Jehu was only the bitter fruit of an evil tree. Of Hosea's daughter it is decreed:

Call her name Lo-ruhama,
for I will no longer show compassion to the house of Israel (1,6).

And in full accord is the symbolic name given to the third and last child:[1]

Call his name Lo-ammi,
for you are not my people,
and I will not be your God (1,9).

Lo-ruhama is "the unpitied." Israel shall no longer be the recipient of Yahweh's *rahamim*, his mercy, the gratuitous love that

[1] The intervening v. 7 referring to Judah is a later addition to the text, probably connected with the deliverance of Jerusalem from the siege of the Assyrian king Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19, 35–37).

inspires his beneficent acts. Yahweh has cast off his people; *lo-ammi*, "not my people," shall henceforth be their name. The motive of this rejection appears in c. 2, where Yahweh (through Hosea) speaks now of Gomer, now of Israel, continually applying the symbolism.

Gomer's harlotry led to her repudiation by Hosea; in 2,4 he pronounces the formula of divorce: "She is not my wife, and I am not her husband." We suspect that she had not merely become casually promiscuous, but a professional prostitute, for the text appears to allude obscurely to the amulets or other trappings worn by these women. Perhaps she had become a ritual prostitute in one of the Canaanized sanctuaries: Hosea refers to this evil institution in 4,1. Therefore she must be stripped naked (v. 5), to be proclaimed an adulteress and a common bawd. Correspondingly, Israel's harlotry is its commerce with foreign gods; its "lovers" after whom it has gone (v. 7) are the Canaanite Baals, to whom, rather than to Yahweh, Israelites were now ascribing the fecundity of the soil and the good things of the earth. For this crime Yahweh will bring blight upon the land and extinction of the kingdom itself, with all its festivals and institutions.

But from the midst of these dire predictions now sounds a note that could be heard in Amos only as a half-forgotten minor theme, but which is one of Hosea's dominant assertions:

> Therefore I shall hedge in her way with thorns,
> and I shall build a wall against her,
> so that she cannot find her paths.
> She will run after her lovers, but not overtake them,
> she will seek them, but not find them.
> Then she will say, "I shall go back to my first husband,
> for it was better with me then than now" (2,8 f.).

Yahweh's punishments are curative, inflicted to bring about a turn of mind and a rending of heart. If Israel is repudiated, there is always hope that it will turn from its evil ways, recognize its

true destiny, and come back to God. Amos had hardly believed this a possibility, but Hosea is more confident:

Therefore, behold, I shall allure her,
I shall bring her into the desert and speak to her heart.
There I shall return to her her vineyards,
and give her the valley of Achor as a door of hope.
There she will respond as in the days of her youth,
as in the days when she went up from the land of Egypt (2,16 f.).

Amos' vague hope is Hosea's surety. Israel shall return; its banishment will retrieve it for Yahweh. For Hosea Israel's desert days were the time of its fidelity, before it had been corrupted by the ways of Canaan. He therefore pictures its restoration as a new entry into the promised land, through the valley of Achor as of old (Jos 7,25), this time to be united with Yahweh forever and with the Baals never more.

On that day—oracle of Yahweh—you will call me "my husband,"
you shall call me no longer "my *baal*."
I shall remove the names of the Baals from her mouth,
and they will be remembered by name no more.
I shall make with them a covenant on that day,
with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air,
and with the crawling things of the ground.
Bow and sword and war I shall destroy from the land,
and I shall make them lie down in security (2,18–20).

For Amos, Yahweh's day to come, his intervention in judgment, was a day for Israel to dread, a day of darkness and not of light. For Hosea it is also a day of light, for in it will be defined the remnant in which Amos scarcely believed, the Israel of faith to be forever Yahweh's.

Israelite women customarily called their husbands *baal*, "master." The word itself was a beautiful one, meaningful to Semitic ears, for it implied the bond of covenant and community. It had been natural for Israel to apply it to Yahweh. But now the profaning hand of Canaan had sullied the name beyond repair, and it must be left to the local gods with whom Israel will never again confound its Creator.

Hosea, unlike Amos, does not hesitate to speak of Israel's relation to Yahweh as a covenant. He thinks of Israel's restoration not only as a renewal of the Sinaitic covenant mediated by Moses, but also as a return to an ideal, paradisaical past, in the same manner that the author of Gn 1,26 ff. thought of the condition of the first man. This idea of a universal peace throughout all created nature that would follow Yahweh's day of judgment was later taken up, in the Bible and afterwards, and given pivotal importance by those exuberant writers we call the apocalyptists. The apocalyptists, however, only articulated an eschatological view already known to the prophets and in part accepted by them. Hosea believed, as did Amos, in a Yahweh who was Master of history, who had irresistible designs for the entire world he had made. To Israel's belief in this future, and in Israel's part in this future, we popularly, though not altogether accurately, attach the name "messianism."

Hosea expresses beautifully the conditions of the new covenant for Israel in 2,21 f., continuing the comparison that likens it to a marriage. So intimately bound up is this description with the remainder of his prophecy, however, we shall understand it better after we have explored some other of his currents of thought.

Thus we are brought to the end of the present story:

And Yahweh said to me:
"Go again, love a woman
  beloved of a paramour and an adulteress;
even as Yahweh loves the people of Israel,
  though they turn to other gods

and love raisin cakes."
So I bought her for fifteen pieces of silver and a *homer* and a
lethech of barley. And I said to her:
"Many days you must wait on me,
not playing the harlot or belonging to any man:
so I in turn shall be to you."
For the children of Israel must wait many days,
without king or prince,
without sacrifice or *massebah*,
without *ephod* or *teraphim*.
Afterwards the children of Israel shall return
and seek Yahweh their God,[2]
and they shall come in fear to Yahweh,
and to his goodness in the latter days (3,1–5).

Hosea knows that Yahweh will take Israel back, for he had taken Gomer back, and the divine forgiveness is certainly not less than man's. He anticipates what Jesus would teach his disciples: "If you, bad as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Lk 11,13). In this chapter Gomer is not mentioned by name, but it seems clear that it is she and not another woman that the prophet is inspired to reclaim. She is described as a kept woman and a prostitute whom Hosea had to redeem from her employers with money and grain. Even as the fallen Gomer, the fallen Israel is to be suffered by her Lord for a period of trial, from which it is confidently hoped that she will emerge triumphant, worthy once more of her spouse.

Israel's trial would be its exile, when it would be deprived of kingship, sacrifices, *massebah*, *ephod*, and *teraphim*. Hosea groups all these together as one; unfortunately, he does not make clear his own attitude toward them, whether he thought them good or

[2] The additional "and David their king" reflects the messianic ideas of later times: a Judahite adaptation.

bad, the condition of Israel's punishment or its cause. He condemned the sacrifices of the Israelite shrines, but evidently for the same reasons that Amos did, without rejecting the sacrificial system in principle. The *massebah* was surely of Canaanite origin, a stone pillar that had been a phallic symbol in Baalistic worship. However, the *masseboth* of the Canaanite shrines had remained in place after the sanctuaries had been converted to the worship of Yahweh, when they had been given an innocent reinterpretation as memorial pillars, even as various pagan signs and symbols were assimilated and reinterpreted by the early Christian Church. The old story recorded in Gn 28,18 shows that later generations of Israelites regarded the *masseboth* as purely Israelitic. The *ephod*, we have seen, was an oracle box (1 Sm 26,6–13; 30,7), used by Canaanite and Israelite alike. *Teraphim*, a relic of polytheism, had once been the tutelary deities of the household (Gn 31,19; Jgs 17,5; 18,14.17 f.). They turn up often in the Bible without condemnation by the biblical authors, however, and therefore they also had presumably been assimilated and given a new interpretation in Yahwistic religion. All in all, we cannot be sure what Hosea intended to say about the monarchy here, simply from the company in which he put it. In a different category entirely are the raisin cakes of v. 1. These were in the prophet's mind certainly an evil, offerings to the fertility goddess Asherah, Baal's female counterpart.

The story ends with Gomer in a state of probation, representing Israel's coming exile. We know nothing further of Hosea's marital history, whether his wife eventually returned to him wholeheartedly as it was hoped that Israel would return to Yahweh.

It bears repeating, this story is so closely tied together, conceptually and even verbally, with the rest of Hosea's prophecy, it is difficult to see it as anything other than a real experience that molded the prophet's mind and determined his convictions. From the shattered ruins of his own life he rose to a conception of the divine love and patience that had never before been conceived by any man. This was revelation. Such was the means God took to

reveal himself to Hosea, and through Hosea to Israel, and through Israel to us.

Hosea's Yahweh is a God of strict justice, but also a God who casts off his people only after deep soul-searching, a loving and suffering God who is resolved that evil shall not at the last prevail. Hosea had not reached that enlightenment into the divine love that allows the Church to dare utter *O felix culpa!*, but he was close enough to have a hint of it. Truly, in his vision we find ourselves face to face with the familiar Father whom Jesus preached to his followers in Galilee.

3. IGNORANCE OF GOD

The prophet's first oracle against Israel, standing as an introduction to his message, is a catalogue of its crimes in the form of an indictment, much in the manner of Amos:

Hear the word of Yahweh, you Israelites,
for Yahweh has a case against the dwellers of the land:
For there is no truth, and no loyalty,
and no knowledge of God in the land.
But swearing and lying, killing and thieving, adultery and violence,
while murder calls forth murder.
Wherefore the land mourns,
and all that dwell therein languish,
even to the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens,
and the very fish of the sea are removed (4,1–3).

Here Hosea's emphasis is on social crimes, as it was with Amos. To these sins—which evidently suppose a moral code like that of the biblical Decalogue—he opposes the virtues of truth, loyalty, and the knowledge of God. The first of these is named just this once by Hosea, but the other two are part of his characteristic vocabulary, like Amos' "right and righteousness." In this context,

"truth" implies mutual fidelity, or to be more specific, the eminently social virtues of veracity and trustworthiness that are opposed to swearing and lying. For the word which after much thought I have decided to translate "loyalty" (*hesed*), there is really no English equivalent. It denotes the sum of one's duties within the bond of a blood relationship, friendship, covenant, or other like association. Here it designates the benevolence and duties of piety owed by one Israelite to another, the dutiful love that ought to have made impossible all the crimes the prophet found in Israel. As a norm of practical action, therefore, it is not far from Amos' "right." By "the knowledge of God" Hosea plainly means a practical knowledge of Yahweh's moral will. This is made clear in the following verses, to which we shall come in a moment.

First, however, we should see what he makes the measure of this pregnant word "loyalty," and how he relates it to Israel's knowledge of God. In 6,4–6 Yahweh is represented appealing for Israel's return:

> What can I do with you, O Ephraim?
> What can I do with you, O Israel?[3]
> For your loyalty is like a morning cloud,
> and like the dew that early goes away.
> Wherefore have I hewn by the prophets,
> I have slain them with the words of my mouth:
> right has gone forth from me like light.
> For loyalty is my desire, not sacrifice,
> and the knowledge of God rather than holocausts.

Israel's loyalty of v. 4 that has melted like dew is its piety and devotion to Yahweh. How this loyalty was supposed to be shown we see from v. 6, where it is once more coupled with "the knowledge of God." Piety is nothing, if not the keeping of God's re-

[3] The present Hebrew text has "Judah," which is commonly taken to be an adaptation.

vealed moral law. Hence the relevance of the "right" that Hosea brings in in v. 5. This word means what it does in Amos, the revelation of Yahweh's will. Ordinarily it is translated "judgment" here, since the immediate context of hewing and slaying appears to imply that it is the revelation of chastisement that is in question.[4] However, it is not necessary to make the prophet's train of thought quite so unconnected. Yahweh's revelation of himself has been one of chastisement, but only because of the malice of man on whom his condescension has been lavished in vain. Hosea's intention throughout is to contrast Yahweh's perennial favor to Israel with Israel's miserable response. Yahweh's manifestation of his moral will, his "right," made known pre-eminently through his prophets, was his blessing of Israel, a light of truth shining in a world of darkness. But for a recalcitrant and hardened people, this light could only be an occasion of their greater culpability and final doom. It may even be, as some believe, that Yahweh's having "hewn" his people by the prophets is an allusion to the Law that was first hewn on stone tablets.

What is certain is that for Hosea, no more than for Amos, religion could never be a name, a profession, a persuasion, a cast of thought. These were nothing, unless it was likewise a commitment to a way of life. In such a fashion as this, Israel's pretence of loyalty to Yahweh and knowledge of its God were exposed as hollow mockery:[5]

They, men that they are, have broken the covenant,
  thereby have they become faithless to me.
Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood;
  like bandits who waylay men is the gang of priests:
  they murder on the way to Shechem, as they have conspired.
In the house of Israel I have seen shocking things:

[4] The CCD version transfers the entire line to v. 3 preceding this passage.

[5] I have rearranged the verses of this passage, following the reconstitution of it adopted by various commentators.

there is Ephraim's fornication, Israel is polluted.
Ephraim's iniquity is revealed, and Samaria's evil,
for they do what is false:
the thief enters the house, the bandit roams abroad,
and they speak not unto their hearts.
All their evil I remember:
now their wicked deeds encompass them,
they appear before my face (6,7–10; 7,1b–2).

The text is much too obscure for us to draw from it many large conclusions. It describes a society that was largely reverting to barbarism, that is plain enough, but it is too allusive to the contemporary scene to allow us to recapture all the details. Hosea has not singled out what to Amos was so obvious, the cold-blooded riving of the social body by powerful, unscrupulous men who had set class against class and thwarted the processes of justice, literally striding over corpses to gain their objectives. Only once does he approach a judgment of this kind, in a passage found toward the end of the prophecies:

Canaan! in his hands are false scales:
to defraud is his delight.
And should Ephraim say, "But I have become rich,
wealth I have found for myself";
yet all his gain cannot be found enough for him
against the guilt which he has sinned.
And I, Yahweh, your God from the land of Egypt,
again I shall make you dwell in tents,
as in the days of the Meeting (12,8–10).

Hosea constantly dwells on the theme of a Canaanized Israel that has gone after the Baals instead of Yahweh. Here he actually gives Israel the name Canaan, just as Isaiah would later call Jeru-

salem Sodom and Gomorrah; he also plays on the meaning of the proper name, which was "merchant" or "trader." Even in this instance Hosea does not speak directly of the dishonest merchants of Israel, but rather compares Israel to a dishonest merchant. However, the net result is much the same. In another play on words (which I have made a feeble effort to catch in the translation) he avows that no amount of material gain (*on*) can balance off against the guilt (*awon*) that Israel has incurred on its merry way to prosperity. There is not enough money in the world, says Hosea, to supply Ephraim with an adequate sin offering to atone for its crimes (cf. 2 Kgs 12,17). Rather, by an appropriate irony, the days of tent dwelling will come upon Israel once more. Somewhat bitterly, the prophet thinks back to the Tent of Meeting (Ex 33,7), when Israel had lived in intimacy with Yahweh and he had chosen this people for his own. Now, on the contrary, to this people decayed and grown effete in its vices, the return to tents can only be a warning of war and pillage and exile.

Hosea is far, therefore, from Amos' preoccupation with the "social question." He is taken up with other, in a sense larger, expressions of Israel's apostasy from Yahweh. It is plain, nonetheless, that Israel's social conduct was as much a religious question to him as it was to Amos. Furthermore, if his mind was at a remove from the passion that could dictate Amos' *J'accuse*, it had a compensatory capacity for probing more patiently and more relentlessly into the ultimate causes of what he found to condemn. Above we saw the indictment with which he began his charges against Israel. Amos would have been inclined to let the indictment speak for itself, but Hosea continues it:

Yet let no one rebuke and no one condemn,
  for my case is with you, O priest!
You stagger by day, and the prophet
  also staggers with you by night . . .
My people has perished for lack of the knowledge.
Because you have rejected the knowledge,

I shall reject you from being my priest.
And you have forgotten the law of your God:
thus shall I, too, forget your children.
As many as they are, so many they sin against me,
they have exchanged their honor for shame.
They eat from the sin of my people,
and on their guilt they have set their appetite.
But it will be like people, like priest:
I shall punish him for his ways,
and his deeds I shall bring back upon him;
and they will eat, yet not be filled,
play the harlot, but make no increase,
for Yahweh they have abandoned to go awhoring (4.4–10).

Debauchery and dissoluteness among the cult personnel are of common remark in the prophetic writings; this sort of thing was to be expected in a national religion that had lost its soul, whose ministers no longer possessed a sense of mission but were the paid functionaries of a state bureaucracy. The scandal itself was enough to revolt an Israelite less fastidious than Hosea, even as holy men and angels have wept in every age when the Lord's anointed have betrayed their calling. Worst of all, however, were not the shabby little vilenesses in the private lives of prophet and priest, but their perversion of the truth that they professed to teach. To them Israel came to learn the mind of Yahweh. If Israel has perished for lack of *the* knowledge, it is because the priests had none to give, for they had rejected it themselves. This is the knowledge of God which in v. 1 the prophet found lacking in Israel, along with truth and loyalty. It is the same knowledge of God that he coupled with loyalty in 6,6 to describe genuine religion, without which sacrifice would be a vain sham. It is, he now elucidates, the law of God, which the priesthood has forgotten.

To be sure, the prophet does not excuse Israel of its sin; he only

accounts for it. Israel's lack of knowledge was culpable, and people and priest together must suffer the same retribution. Hosea knew that a people generally gets the leadership it deserves. Nevertheless, greater was the sin of those who had the duty to lead Israel in God's knowledge, who instead had been the most active in frustrating his will. Their sin was the more contemptible because they stood to gain in a material way from their dereliction of duty and Israel's apostasy, whether through the priestly share in sin offerings and sacrifices of reparation (Lv 7,7), or by even more direct involvement in their crimes, as the enigmatic reference to priest-murderers in 6,9 could suggest.

When Hosea specifies that the moral law is the knowledge of God, he does not only link it with God as its source, he identifies it with God's very existence. To a Semite, knowledge was nothing merely speculative and intellectual; it was the practical experience of a reality. What Yahweh was, Yahweh had done: Israel's knowledge of God was its experience of Yahweh, who was known in his acts. To live in the knowledge of God was to live as Yahweh had revealed himself to be, to live his life. In 10,12, Hosea admonishes Israel:

Sow for yourselves unto righteousness,
harvest in accordance with loyalty,
plough for yourselves a furrow of knowledge, seeking Yahweh,
till he comes and teaches you righteousness.

In this sense, righteousness is its own reward. When one tills the field of life in righteousness and the knowledge of God, he reaps according to his sowing; by doing Yahweh's will Israel continues in his presence and grows in his knowledge.

Very like is this verse from a passage in which Israel is figured in the person of its ancestor Jacob, in which Hosea applies the text of Gn 28,15:

And you, with your God you shall return:
preserve loyalty and right,
and attend on your God steadfastly (12,7).

Knowledge of God is living with God, which understands the practice of rightdoing and the benevolent good will that have been revealed in him.

We are now ready, I think, to see the meaning of a passage that I deferred before, Hosea's description of the new covenant that Yahweh will contract with Israel, after it has been purified in exile and has proved itself worthy of his renewed love:

I shall espouse you to me forever;
I shall espouse you to me with righteousness and right,
and with loyalty and compassion;
I shall espouse you to me with fidelity,
and you shall know Yahweh (2,21 f.).

Righteousness and right, loyalty and compassion and fidelity are the bridal gift (Gn 24,53; 34,12) with which Yahweh will dower Israel in this new marriage. They are Yahweh himself possessed by his people; in them he will be known by Israel. As Yahweh is righteousness and right, loyalty, compassion, fidelity, so Israel must be in knowing Yahweh. Such is the effect of divine grace, that men may live the life of God and show themselves his familiars. The New Testament would broaden this vision, it could not alter it.

4. THE COVENANT

Hosea is one of the prophets who ground their moral teaching on what the Hebrews called *torah* (so also Is 5,24; 30,9; 42,24; Jer

2,8; 6,19; 9,12; 16,11; 26,4). *Torah* was traditional "instruction," "teaching," and thus "law." Eventually the five books of the Pentateuch, containing as they do the several lawcodes that Israel acknowledged to be of divine origin, came to be called the *Torah*.

The law of Yahweh was the traditional religious instruction which prophet and priest had the duty to impart, and which Hosea accuses the priesthood of having forgotten. It was the revelation of Yahweh's moral will, himself as the object of knowledge, therefore not a set of arbitrary rules nor a series of tabus. The rules were there, of course, for it was in them that man recognized *torah* in the concrete. But in obeying them, he was privileged to enter into the divine governance of the world and to think with the mind that had brought the world into being.

The doctrine of Israel's election, which Hosea unhesitatingly calls a covenant, was quite as important to him as it had been to Amos. Through election the knowledge of God came to Israel; *torah* was Israel's life and destiny under the covenant.

It is typical of Hosea that he views Israel's election as a manifestation of Yahweh's love, and Yahweh's continued revelation of himself to Israel as the perpetuation of this love:

> When Israel was a child, I loved him:
> from Egypt I have called to my son.
> The more I called to them,
> the more they have walked from me (11, 1 f.).

This text does not mean, as it has sometimes been taken to mean, that Yahweh called Israel from Egypt to be his son; Israel was already Yahweh's son in Egypt (Ex 4,22; Dt 14,1). Rather, the Exodus and all that it included were the evidence of Yahweh's paternal love. By this means, the prophet continues in v. 4, Yahweh intended to bind Israel to himself "with bonds of love." In love the covenant had been set up, to draw from Israel a reciprocal love, the "loyalty"

which to Hosea is the substance of all religion. This loyalty had Yahweh for its object, of course, but also—as an expression, not an added thing—all other Israelites who had become brothers through Yahweh's fatherhood. This the prophet made amply clear in his insistence that Israel's social sins were proof that its loyalty for Yahweh was dead.

The classic Hoseanic expression of the covenant founded in love, we have seen, places Israel in a marital rather than a filial relation to its God. It is in pursuit of this metaphor that Israel's religious apostasy is "harlotry," lusting after other gods than Yahweh, her only spouse. Harlotry is any act that withdraws Israel from Yahweh's law and thus violates his conjugal authority, but especially the practice of superstitious and alien rites, forbidden divination, and worship at the Canaanite shrines on hilltops and under sacred trees (4,12 f.). When these were joined with ritual prostitution (4,14), "harlotry," indeed, became more than a metaphor.

However, Hosea can also think of election and the covenant in more or less legal terms, just as Amos did. Israel is indicted and put on trial for its crimes as well as reproached for its lack of love. Its hankering after foreign alliances with Assyria or Egypt (10,4; 12,2) is a breach of its compact with Yahweh, a denial of its covenant commitments. Israel's entire history has been a continual violation of Yahweh's rights:

A trumpet to your lips,
for a vulture hovers over Yahweh's house!
For they have broken my covenant,
and transgressed against my law.
Though they cry to me,
"O God of Israel, we know you!"
Israel has thrown away what is good;
the enemy shall pursue them.
They made kings, but not by me,
they made princes, and I knew it not.

With their silver and gold they made
idols for themselves, to their own destruction.
I spurn your calves, O Samaria,
my wrath is kindled against them . . . (8,1–5).

Kingship and cult alike in Israel were standing affronts to Yahweh's lordship. It would, indeed, have been difficult to find anything of monarchy's once sacred character in the intrigue and cabal and bloodshed of these latter days, when self-interested loyalties and political opportunism called the tune rather than the charisma of God (10,3 f.). Hosea expressly brands as idolatry the cult of the golden bulls which the first Jeroboam had instituted in the royal sanctuaries of the north (1 Kgs 12,25–30). Archeology and ancient Near Eastern history have shown that the original intent in the use of these images was not to mingle the worship of Yahweh with that of other gods, or even to represent Yahweh himself, but rather to connote the invisible presence of divinity, as did the cherubim and the Ark in the Jerusalem temple. In the depraved religious thinking of these evil days, however, the images were only idols, the more so since the bull, as a symbol of power and fertility, served to represent Baal in the cult of Canaan.

Hosea continues to do the unexpected in his prophecy. Though he thought of Israel's election as Yahweh's choice of an innocent bride, he knew how fleeting its innocence had been. He reminds Israel of unsavory incidents from its past, chosen rather indiscriminately, as the outrages of Gibeah (9,9; 10,9 f., cf. Jgs 19–21) or the shame of Baal-peor (9,10, cf. Nm 25,1–5). The curse of Ephraim in 9,14 sounds very much as though the prophet had reversed the ancient blessing of the Joseph tribes (Ephraim) that appears in Gn 49,25. But the most intriguing of his comparisons is in a lengthy passage, part of which we have already seen, in which he recalls events from the life of the remote patriarchal ancestor Jacob (Israel), continually applying them to the contemporary people Israel.

The passage is interesting, first of all, because it has been molded in that matrix of Semitic thought that Westerners sometimes find curious, the idea of "corporate personality," in which the individual and the group fuse into one. This way of thinking is not wholly alien to us. We do not find it hard, in wartime, say, to ascribe personality to a nation in a way that transcends any figure of speech—"the Hun must be destroyed!" Still, in our better moments we reject judgments of this kind as aberrant from our normal thought processes. The religious or racial bigot focuses his hatred on a corporate personality, but even he belies the congruity of this with his other attitudes by claiming that "some of my best friends are Jews." When Shakespeare makes Henry V "England" and Goneril's husband "France," it is with few, if any, vestiges of the mystique that clung to the Semitic notion of kingship. Though we probably have more of this "totality thinking" about us than we realize, we also have it at our disposal to separate thoroughly the individual from the community to which he belongs.

For the Semite, on the other hand, while he certainly knew the difference between an individual and the collectivity, the two were so much a part of each other that they could never be wholly separated in his mind. At one and the same time a person was an individual and his society. At one and the same time Israel was an historical person of the past and a corporate person of the present. Israel the patriarch was not simply representative of Israel the nation; they were both the same Israel. There is perhaps something akin to this in our own experience of inherited history. Americans of only a first or second generation's standing find it both easy and natural to identify 1812 as "our second war of independence." But other factors than a sense of solidarity with the past and with a people contribute to such situations in modern times. At best, the sense is with us a casual one which can be turned on and off. With the Semite, it was his habitual grasp of reality.

Another reason that makes Hosea's choice of extended analogy interesting to us is the contrast of his view of the traditional de-

tails of Jacob's life with the treatment of the same details in Genesis. The contrast is the more pronounced for appearing in one of the very few prophetic passages that take account of the patriarchal stories.

Hosea begins with the assertion that

> Yahweh has a case against Israel;[6]
> he will punish Jacob according to his ways,
> he will repay him according to his deeds (12,3).

And among other things, he finds reprehensible the manner in which Jacob had supplanted Esau (Gn 25,26; 32,29), a pattern for Israel's subsequent and consistent history of deceit. Now in Genesis, these incidents are not held up to Jacob's reproach. They are recorded without comment by the author, but whatever his feeling in the matter, we can be sure that the ancient storyteller on whom he drew had put these events on Jacob's credit side, evidence of a commendable shrewdness. This would be the case particularly since the stories presuppose the national rivalry of Israel and Edom, the latter represented by its traditional ancestor Esau (corporate personality again!). However, I imagine that more than one modern reader has been inclined to agree with Hosea when reading Genesis, that Jacob was a bit too shrewd to be quite moral. Hosea's judgment doubtless reflects a sharpened moral appreciation of the ancient stories that have been collected in Genesis. It is another example of what we saw above, how his view of the Jehu rebellion differed from the storyteller's whose work is in the Book of Kings.

While Hosea agrees with Genesis, therefore, that the patriarchal history was a remote preparation for the great covenant, he also saw in it a prophecy of Israel's history under the covenant, which had been a history of ingratitude and double-dealing.

[6] The present Hebrew text has "Judah" here again.

5. HOSEA THE THEOLOGIAN

It has been natural to compare Hosea with Amos on various counts. If they are two prophets in agreement on fundamentals, they are also severely unalike in numerous ways, despite their having prophesied in the same area and at least partially in the same period. Did they know of each other? It is likely that they did, though they give no hint of this in their writings. Some authors have believed that Hosea does refer to Amos once or twice, but this is far from being proved. The prophets in general, as a matter of fact, cite one another only by exception, just as they cite very little else. Their ordinary credentials were their own personal authority as men sent by Yahweh.

I have already suggested that the very rapidity of the decay of the northern kingdom in which Hosea was living determined to some extent the emphases that distinguish his prophetic spirit from that of Amos. We get the impression, too, that Hosea moved on a higher level of society than Amos, which brought him into closer personal contact with the princes and rulers whose policies had been the ruination of Israel. This in itself would have encouraged his less impassioned but more searching and reflective analysis of cause and effect of Israel's woes, while Amos' was the voice of outraged protest against these woes where they were immediately felt. There is in Hosea's prophecy a notable absence of the repeated "thus says Yahweh" or "oracle of Yahweh" that wind in and out of Amos' speech. Amos was lashing out face to face at evil incarnated in the venal, corrupt, worldly hypocrites who elbowed him aside in the market places and temple courtyards, while Hosea's oracles were probably produced in comparative calm.

These reasons, together with the two distinct personalities upon whom the spirit of Yahweh descended, explain the separate refinements of the two prophecies. Amos is an orator and a preacher. Hosea is a thinker, a poet, and easily the theologian of the two.

It would be a false question to ask which of them was the greater

prophet or contributed more to Israelitic prophetism's honorable history. The compiler and the commentator, the field historian and the philosopher of history, diverse though their tastes and tendencies may be, are as indispensable to each other as they are to the work that they jointly produce. The analogy should not be pressed, of course, for we have learnt very well that Amos is no mere voice of protest or pedlar of social tracts in comparison with Hosea. His approach to the life and society in which he lived was not untheological, it was simply not as theological as Hosea's. And he had that to contribute which Hosea did not.

The prophets, like other men, ought to be judged on what they tried to do rather than on what they did not. Neither Amos nor Hosea tried to be the other, but each spoke the truth as God and his genius gave him to see it. We should be the poorer without either one of the two.

How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
  How can I deliver you over, O Israel?
How can I treat you like Admah,
  dispose of you like Zeboiim?
My heart is in turmoil within me,
  my compassion is all on fire.
I will not give rein to my fierce anger,
  I will not again destroy Ephraim!
For I am God and not man,
  the Holy in your midst;
  I will not come to destroy! (Hos 11,8 f.).

For some readers, these are the most sublime lines of the Old Testament. Certainly they contain one of the most poignant and daring portrayals of God in all human poetry. This God of pathos, this God who cares, who weeps over his own inexorable justice, we cannot discover in Amos. He is the God who has been revealed to us through Jesus Christ. In this respect, there can be no

doubt which prophet has known God at his best and truest, and has made this knowledge man's eternal heritage.

Yet for all that, Yahweh did level Samaria like Admah and Zeboiim, even as Amos has said he would. And if Hosea had a first clear glimpse of the *agape* of the New Testament, it was Amos, and not Hosea, who first proclaimed the moral will of a transcendent God that touches every man of every age.

CHAPTER SIX

Micah of Moresheth

A NOTE ON THE TEXT OF MICAH'S PROPHECIES

Second only to Hosea, the Book of Micah is in an extremely bad state of preservation. If there is some consolation in the fact that Micah's style is by no means as obscure as Hosea's, there is also a new problem for the reader in the number of passages—much greater proportionately than in Amos and Hosea—whose Mican authorship may be questioned.

The book falls neatly into three parts, and the critical problems follow the division. Cc. 1–3 are doom-prophecies against Judah condemning its social and other crimes, with an especial repudiation of all those in authority. There has never been any doubt that the substance of these chapters is the work of Micah; only 2,12 f., an unexpected prophecy of salvation in the midst of these woes, has been ascribed to another hand—at the least, it comes from another period of the prophet's ministry. The precise chronology of the material in these chapters cannot be determined. Mi 1,6 must antedate 725 B.C., *the beginning of the siege of Samaria. Here Micah warns Samaria of coming retribution, which he would hardly have done had the city already been devastated by Sargon. Mi 3,12 is cited in Jer 26,18 f. as a prophecy from the time of Hezekiah. Probably we must be content to place all the prophecies of these chapters within the reigns of Hezekiah and his father Ahaz*

and attempt no finer determination of their relative age. Mi 1,8 f., however, seems to presuppose the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib that occurred in 701.

Critics of a generation ago ended the prophecy of Micah at this point and refused to go further. Criticism is less dogmatic nowadays, but probably a majority of independent critics would still entertain misgivings about all or most of cc. 4–5, the second part of our book. These chapters are entirely concerned with the salvation of God's people and the destruction of its enemies (5,9–13, however, appears to have been originally an oracle of doom against Israel or Judah). In the pages that follow I have adopted the view that these two chapters, together with 2,12 f., perhaps, date from the period of messianic enthusiasm that resulted from the rout of Sennacherib's army, and therefore can be the work of Micah. The passages have undergone additions from later times, but the bulk of the material is quite conceivable in an eighth-century setting.

In regard to the final section, cc. 6–7, there has been recently a change in critical attitudes. Formerly these chapters were almost universally regarded as, in substance at least, the work of some postexilic prophet, or of several postexilic prophets. Now there is an increasing tendency to agree that the whole section can just as easily be Micah's, deriving from the same periods of his activity as the prophecies in cc. 1–3. These final chapters, too, are largely devoted to the condemnation of Israel and Judah.

It is evident that the editor of the book separated two collections of doom-oracles with a collection of oracles of salvation, inserted by way of relief. Just as evidently, he paid little or no attention to chronology.

1. THE MAN OF THE BOOK

The prophet Micah rose in Judah sometime toward the close of Hosea's work in Israel. The editor's title (Mi 1,1) places him under the Judahite kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, or, as outside dates, between the years 750 and 686 B.C. The nature of his proph-

ecies seems to confirm the accuracy of these statistics. As I indicated in the preceding note, he evidently began to prophesy before the fall of the northern kingdom (722), thus during the reign of Ahaz.[1] Though nothing directly connects Micah with Jotham, the connection is likely, especially as it is now assumed that Ahaz began his reign as regent for his father Jotham (2 Kgs 15,37; 16,5 ff. support this assumption by putting the Syro-Ephraimite war in the time of both kings). Equally, there would appear to be no doubt that part of Micah's prophecy dates from the days of Hezekiah, after the invasion of Sennacherib. We have no way of knowing when his prophetic ministry would have closed; a pall of silence is spread over the history of Judah precisely at the end of the eighth century, and by it are covered Micah and Isaiah and Hezekiah himself. Sennacherib wrote the *finis* to an era in Judah.

Micah can be and invariably is compared with Amos. His Yahweh also speaks out from Zion (4,2, cf. Am 1,2), and he is preeminently a God of justice. He has Amos' blunt, uncompromising language, and the same intimacy with the oppressed and with the details of their oppression. If anything, he shows an even greater awareness of social evils than Amos does.

Without question he was a member of the humbler Judahite classes. His speech is homely and unpolished, and his name, like Amos', is not coupled with his father's (presumably a sign that one was not *hijo de algo*). Both Mi 1,1 and Jer 26,18 say that he was from Moresheth (in Mi 1,14 called Moresheth-Gath), a little village of the Judahite Shephelah (lowlands) identified with the present-day Khirbet el-Basal near Beit Jibrin, something over twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem. In the series of threats in 1,10–15 in which he marshals an assembly of the towns and villages

[1] I follow the chronology which puts the beginning of Hezekiah's reign in the year 716 or 715; 2 Kgs 18, 13 dates Sennacherib's Palestinian campaign (about 702, as known from Assyrian sources) in Hezekiah's fourteenth year. It is true, this conflicts with 2 Kgs 18,1.9 f., according to which the sack of Samaria (722) occurred in Hezekiah's sixth year. Plainly one must choose one or the other calculation, and most scholars choose the one I have adopted.

of this west country of Judah, we doubtless see the neighborhood with which he was most familiar and which was the scene of his earliest prophecies. He was in all likelihood a small farmer or craftsman of a Judahite country town, one whose daily existence had lain in the path of the social changes through which Judah had passed under the kings.

Micah shares the proclivity of the more popular literature of the Old Testament to deal in word plays—in the list of cities just mentioned in 1,10–15 there is an extraordinary number of them, as something is made of practically every name. Unfortunately, in distinction to most of the other prophets whom we consider in this book, Micah has left us with no record of the circumstances of his call to prophecy. His name ("Who is like Yahweh?") is the same as that of the earlier prophet of whom we are told in 1 Kgs 22, whose name is usually transcribed Micaiah. Later Jewish thought confused the two, so that in 1 Kgs 22,28 someone at some time inserted the words, "Hear, O peoples all!," taken from the first verse of Micah's collected prophecies. The confusion may have been deliberate, in an effort to supply for the lack of authentic information about a prophet concerning whom later generations would have willingly known more.

2. THE RISE OF JUDAHITE CAPITALISM

After the separation of the kingdoms under Rehoboam, Judah had been at first left in a condition considerably inferior to that of the larger and more powerful Israel of the north. In the first place, it was bypassed by both the major caravan routes that had meant so much for the wealth of united Israel under Solomon. The "way of the sea" route from Mesopotamia to Carchemish and Damascus passed through northern Israel at the pass of Megiddo and thence through Philistia into Egypt, entirely outside Judah. The route from southern Arabia separated at Petra and went westward to Gaza, again through Philistia, or followed the Transjordan way to Damascus. The income from tolls, consequently,

was eaten up by Edom and the nomads of the steppes rather than by Judah. While Israel was naturally rich in vales, meadows, and spacious plains suitable for agriculture, Judah was steep and tortuous, much of it entirely desert. In the Shephelah were olive groves and sycamores in abundance, but mostly the land had to find its livelihood in pasturing rather than crops. The topography was ill-adapted to rapid communication, a necessity for a country that is to be organized for economic efficiency. Judah was, therefore, at once isolated from the foreign contacts that enriched Israel and unable readily to compensate for its lack in any way. By some means or other it held on to Edom during the early days of the divided kingdoms, but it was too weak to continue to exploit the mines of the Arabah or to make use of the port of Elath. The Bible tells of no Judahite activity in the Arabah at this time, and archeology indicates that there was none. Finally, Edom successfully rebelled and gained its independence.

Shishak's invasion during Rehoboam's reign must have found Judah much less prepared than even Israel for such a blow. Shishak plundered the gold of the temple and the royal palace, and Rehoboam was able to replace it with bronze only (1 Kgs 14,25–28; 2 Ch 12,1–12). The luxury of the elaborate system of defences maintained in this early period of cold war between Israel and Judah would also have been much less a strain on the former than on the latter. In addition, Judah apparently had its own problems of internal security. The "cities of defence" garrisoned by Rehoboam (2 Ch 11,5–12), all of which are to the south and west of Jerusalem, could hardly have been directed against Israel; they were his protection against Judah itself, where he was scarcely more popular than in Israel: by them "he held Judah and Benjamin." Asa, third in line in the kingdom (911–869), was forced to buy an alliance with Ben-Hadad of Damascus with the remainder of the temple and palace treasure in order to relieve Israel's pressure on Judah, incidentally precipitating the first hostile action of Damascus against either of the two kingdoms. This manoeuvre resulted in Baasha's withdrawal from Ramah, and with the building stone and

wood that he left behind Asa fortified Gibeah and Mizpah. Archeology has uncovered the great wall he built at Mizpah (Tell en-Nasbeh); the Bible notes that for its construction Asa was forced to declare a *corvée* "with no one excepted" (1 Kgs 15,16–22). In somewhat happier times, the temple was able to undergo necessary repairs only through popular subscription, and all the outlay—silver alone is mentioned, not gold—was devoted to strictly practical uses (2 Kgs 12,10–17). Once again, when Hazael threatened Jerusalem after a successful raid on the Philistines, Joash had to strip the capital bare of its remaining resources to fend off the attack (2 Kgs 12,18 f.). All in all, we are hardly surprised to find Judah invariably subordinate to Israel during at least the first part of their history together.

At the same time, Judah probably resisted change in its social institutions longer than Israel did, following in the tradition of David. At the end of Athaliah's usurpation (841–835) it was the priesthood, the palace guards founded by David, and "the people of the land" (the gentry?) who united to restore Yahwistic traditions (including a covenant made by the king) by placing Joash on the throne (2 Kgs 11,4–20; 2 Ch 23). Again, after Amon was assassinated in a palace revolution, the people of the land stepped in to prevent the country from going the way of anarchy and to ensure the proper succession of Josiah (2 Kgs 21,23; 2 Ch 33,25). After Josiah's untimely death at Megiddo, once more the people of the land tried to intervene in Judah's best interests by bringing Jehoahaz to the throne, though this time they were frustrated by Pharaoh Neco (2 Kgs 23,29–33; 2 Ch 36,1–4).

Archeology confirms the biblical picture of Judahite poverty. The excavations of Tell ed-Duweir (Lachish) reveal a steady economic decline occurring between the years 925 and 800, in which period rather close contact was maintained with Egypt. King Jehoshaphat made an attempt to restore the port of Ezion-Geber (Elath) in Edom with a fleet of "ships of Tarshish," but the ships were wrecked and the venture came to nothing (1 Kgs 22,48–50; 2 Ch 20,35–37). Under Jehoram (848–841), Edom was lost to

Judah, and there was no further chance to utilize the port until the time of Azariah, nearly a century later. Having married into the family of Jezebel, the Tyrian queen of Israel, Jehoram may have made an attempt to ally himself with commercial Phoenicia, but his reign was short, and with the murder of his son by Jehu and Athaliah's consequent usurpation the kingdom was thrown into turmoil. How much the exploitation of the mines of the Arabah and the traffic in copper could have meant to Judah we may judge from the relative tribute paid to the Assyrian king Esarhaddon in a later day, as appears in Esarhaddon's records: while Judah paid ten minas of silver, twelve were exacted from the little province of Edom. (In the same tribute Moab and Ammon, which were transected by the Arabian trade route, paid respectively one and two minas of gold.)

After a century of this existence, however, Judah's sombre aspect seems to have brightened considerably. Under the impetus of renewed national spirit and unity manifested in the unseating of Athaliah and the reign of Joash, there was a rebirth for Judah in direct proportion to the decline of Israel, which was not prospering under Jehu's dynasty and was sorely beset by the rivalry of Damascus. Under Amaziah (796–767) Judah not only began the reconquest of Edom, it also felt itself strong enough to test its strength with Israel, seemingly after the rejection of a marriage alliance on Israel's part. The moment for this test was ill chosen, for Israel had been newly freed of the Syrian menace and was able to defend itself vigorously. Jehoash of Israel was victorious over Judah at Beth-shemesh and pillaged Jerusalem (2 Kgs 14,7–14; 2 Ch 25,17–24). Probably as a result of this debacle (as is insinuated by 2 Ch 25,27), Amaziah was forced to abdicate and died in a revolt that ended for him in Lachish. The reconquest of Edom, however, was concluded by his son Azariah, who rebuilt Elath for Judah (2 Kgs 14,17–22).

To this last event the Chronicler (2 Ch 26,1–15) ascribes the prosperity which he associates with the reign of Azariah, also called Uzziah (767–739), using language like that with which he

describes the times of David and Solomon. Excavations at Tell Beit Mirsim (the biblical Debir) have shown that Judah did, indeed, now pass through a real change—this tidy settlement in the Shephelah quite doubled or trebled its earlier population, and remained flourishing until Sennacherib's invasion.

Another archeological indication of economic transition in Judah has been supplied by the so-called royal jar-handle stamps, several hundred specimens of which have been discovered in every part of the ancient kingdom. The stamps on these handles read in standard fashion "royal *bath*" (the *bath* was a fluid measure of some seven or eight gallons), and usually give the name of a city, Hebron, Ziph, Socoh, or Memshath (the last nowhere mentioned in the Bible). Though the point is debated, the most reasonable explanation of the jars is that they were standard, royally approved measures. If this interpretation is correct, it points to royal organization and control of the country's economic life—a far cry from the meticulous standardization and price fixing of contemporary commercial states like Babylon, to be sure, but also a real change from the Israel of the past.

The sameness of these and other ceramics of the period likewise suggests the organization of industry. Archeology has further evidence to offer in support of this conclusion. Tell Beit Mirsim not only possessed a varied industry, it possessed it on too extensive a scale (large dye works, for example) for it to have been purely private. Since it could only have been a minor city in the Judahite economy, it is a fair conclusion that it gives only a hint of the extent to which industry had been developed in the Shephelah. The American excavations carried out since 1957 at el-Jib (Gibeon) have established that this city, too, was highly developed commercially in Judah's latter period, the centre of a thriving wine trade.

We no longer have to surmise, therefore; we know how Judah made up for its lack of agriculture to become a relatively wealthy country. By an industrial revolution its wood, its wool, its olive groves, and its vineyards were united with its crafts to manufacture

goods for export. Only a brisk foreign trade can account for the plunder that Sennacherib was able to carry away with him, according to his own records.

It was probably because of Judah's new-found prosperity and hegemony that the Syro-Ephraimite league descended on it sometime around 735. The Bible represents this league, formed by Samaria and Damascus, as part of an attempted alliance against Assyria; its invasion of Judah was in reprisal for Judah's refusal to join the alliance. From Is 7,6 we also learn that the invasion had as its purpose to dethrone Ahaz and impose another king on Judah, a certain "son of Tabeel." Now Tabeel was apparently an Aramean state, not the name of a person. It has been conjectured that this "son of Tabeel" was a son of Uzziah or Jotham by an Aramean princess, though he might as easily have been Rezin himself, the king of Damascus, or some other member of the coalition that fell on Judah. At any rate, the invasion was not a casual thing, but an all-out effort to subjugate Judah. Israel and Damascus were both in desperate straits owing to Assyrian exactions, and they saw in Judah a menace to be removed and a booty well worth their ultimate gamble. As it turned out, they were quickly overrun by Assyria, though with their help Edom regained its independence from Judah.

It was not the loss of the Edomite seaport that proved to be the league's most disastrous result for Judah. Rather, it was the intervention of Assyria, called in at Ahaz' appeal to his "protecting power." Judah had become Assyria's protégé at some unknown time, possibly on the occasion of the Azriau coalition,[2] a fact that can help account for its economic expansion in a world

[2] Assyrian inscriptions refer to a certain Azriau of Iuda as the head of the Arameo-Arab league to which Israel lent its support in resisting Tiglath-pileser III. So striking is the similarity of his name to that of Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah, some authorities still believe that the king of Judah had been the focus of opposition to Assyria. But the Assyrian records evidently concern an Aramean prince and state. Judah is apparently not mentioned by Tiglath-pileser in connection with the Azriau fiasco.

overlorded by the Great King. Under Ahaz, who was certainly regarded by the Assyrians as one of their vassals, Judah was submitted to an Assyrianization that went far beyond mere political timeserving. This we can see most clearly in the account of 2 Kgs 16,10–16, which tells of Ahaz' modification of the Jerusalem temple after his meeting with Tiglath-pileser at Damascus. That the biblical historian devoted such attention to this episode shows the importance he attached to it. The altar seen by Ahaz in Damascus of which he had the replica made in Jerusalem may have been either Syrian or Assyrian, but what is sure is that Ahaz ended by making a pagan house of worship of the temple in which just a few years before Isaiah had received his call to prophecy.

Under Ahaz, therefore, Judah officially deserted Yahweh as the God of its election. The new deity who ousted him from the temple of Jerusalem may have been Hadad-Rimmon, the national god of the Arameans, who was worshipped under the form of a bull, as Yahweh was in the sanctuaries of northern Israel. This could give added meaning to the summary of Ahaz' reign in 2 Kgs 16,2 ff., that he "did not do what was right in the eyes of Yahweh his God, like David his father, but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel." Similarly, these words of Micah which are believed by many to refer to Israel, could equally well have been uttered against Judah:

> You have observed the statutes of Omri,
> and all the deeds of the house of Ahab,
> and you have walked in their counsels:
> that I should display you as a desolation,
> (all its inhabitants will be a hissing,)
> and the contempt of peoples you shall bear (6,16).

The story of Ahaz' change of the temple, a splendid commentary on the prophetic opposition to foreign alliances, implies a thor-

oughgoing alteration in Judahite culture which the biblical historian did not bother to spell out. Since Israelite morality was in proportion to the depth of its Yahwistic foundation, demolition of the one was possible only with the removal of the other. Ahaz could hardly have done what he did had not Yahwistic religion long since ceased to play any practical part in the lives of those Judahites who mattered. It is no surprise, therefore, when we learn from Micah and Isaiah that in its prosperity Judah, like Israel before it, had become habituated to a way of life in public and in private that was at variance with its religious traditions.

Thus it was that precisely when Judah most needed an uncloudy vision of its moral duties in order to cope with the challenges of its new political and economic status, events conspired to render the influence of Yahwism most ineffective. Hezekiah, who succeeded Ahaz, tried to remedy the situation by repudiating the Assyrian covenant and restoring the worship of Yahweh. But the ease with which Manasseh brought Judah back to the ways of Ahaz after Hezekiah's death is eloquent in testimony that with those who governed the land there had been little sympathy for Hezekiah's reform.

3. DEVOURERS OF THE LAND

The editor of Micah's prophecies noted that they were directed to both Samaria and Jerusalem. Though Judah was Micah's first concern—the moribund northern kingdom, in any event, did not endure beyond his first few years—he is catholic in his denunciation of both kingdoms. It is thus that he begins his prophecy, with a stately and solemn tone proper to himself:

> Hear, O peoples all,
> heed, O land and its inhabitants!
> Let Yahweh be witness against you,
> the Lord from his holy temple (1,2).

As do Amos and Hosea, Micah has Yahweh summon his people to respond as in a court trial. Here the whole people is indicted, north and south. Here, too, a special note of awe attends the summons. Using language that later would be called "apocalyptic," he pictures Yahweh coming upon Israel in a terrifying theophany:

> For Yahweh goes forth from his place,
> he descends upon the heights of the land.
> The mountains melt beneath him,
> and the valleys are split asunder,
> like wax before a fire,
> like water poured down a slope (v. 3 f.).

Thereupon the prophet begins to catalogue Judah's sins. Like Hosea, he finds the people guilty of harlotry in its detestable adoption of Gentile religious practices. But his chief emphasis lies where Amos concentrated his attack on Israel, in the sins of man against man.

The following is certainly from Micah's earliest period:

> Woe to those who meditate wickedness,
> who work out evil deeds on their couches;
> in the light of morning they carry it out,
> when they have the power to do it.
> They covet fields and seize them,
> and houses they take away;
> they despoil a man of his house,
> a person of his inheritance.
> Therefore, thus says Yahweh:
> Behold, I am meditating against this family
> an evil from which you will not save your necks,
> and you shall not walk proudly,
> for it will be an evil time.
> In that day there will rise a parable against you,
> and a lamentation will be chanted, thus:

"We have been destroyed utterly!"
The portion of my people has been measured off,
and no one will give it back to them.
"Our fields he has apportioned to our captors!"
Hence you will have no one to decide the shares by lot
in the assembly of Yahweh (2,1–5).

With bitter sarcasm Micah speaks of men who are so wicked the daylight hours do not suffice for them to do their worst; they must deprive themselves of sleep to plot fresh villainy. The specific crime he singles out is the steady encroachments of the great landowners on the holdings of the less well-to-do. We must remember, in the eyes of traditional Israel this was an evil in itself, with or without other violation of rights, whether accomplished by fair means or foul. It was a policy dedicated to the extinction of the "inheritance"—the very term used by Naboth in the story of 1 Kgs 21—on which the social order of the past had depended for its stability. The latifundists had blithely demolished the structure of family ownership not in the name of any better or more realistic system that they had to offer in its place, for they had none, but out of frank and unabashed greed. Micah's anger is not simply that of a man constitutionally suspicious of change, though something of this probably does enter into his feelings. He is angry, and helplessly outraged, because a way of life that had once been purposeful and humane, whatever its other defects, had been sacrificed not so much in deliberation as through contempt for it, to a philosophy no more ennobling than that of dog-eat-dog. Whether the passing of the old order had been an inevitability does not enter into the prophet's calculations. He knows only that it had been replaced by what was evil and indefensible.

For this reason Yahweh in turn meditates evil against this family that has made its war on the family, that has spurned the society his will had brought into being. What it has gained by violence shall be

taken from it by violence. Strangers will repossess the land of Judah, and no more will it be divided by lot among Yahweh's people. The last is an allusion, doubtless, to the tradition of the initial apportionment of the Promised Land among the families of Israel (Jos 13 ff.). It may be, too, that in Judahite villages the arable land had been periodically redistributed by lot, following a custom that is still preserved today by some of the Transjordan Arabs.

Micah continues his indictment:

"Prophesy not!"—they prophesy—
"Prophesy not such things!
Let him withdraw this shameful charge!
Can the house of Jacob be accursed?
Is Yahweh's spirit, then, cut short?
Could such things be done by him?"
Do not my words do good
only to him who walks uprightly?
But you, you are not my people;
you stand as the foes of my people.
You steal away the peaceful man's mantle,
the honest wayfarer you loot as though in war!
The women of my people
you drive away from their beloved homes;
their offspring you deprive
forever of my honor:
"Arise and begone,
for this is no resting place!"
In consideration of a nothing
you exact a forced pledge (2,6–10).

Micah mocks his mockers, the voices of false confidence and false prophecy, those who cannot bring themselves to believe that Yahweh's patience is not endless. But judgment has already been passed;

Yahweh no longer has a people to protect. Not he but Judah itself has bereft the family hearth. Judah is the cause of its own coming exile, when the mothers of future generations will be driven from the land. Judah itself has made these generations forfeit the honor Yahweh had destined for them, to be a people consecrated to him in his Land of Promise. Judah itself, by its every vile action, has denied itself to be that resting place (*menuhah*) that Yahweh had once constituted it in a happier day (Dt 12,9; Ps 95,11, etc.).

Bitter complaints of a similar kind are lodged against Judah in the final chapters of the book.

> Hear Yahweh calling to the city:
> Hear, O tribe and assembly of the city,
> whose rich men are filled with violence,
> and whose inhabitants speak lies,
> their tongues a deceit in their mouths.
> Can I forget the house of the wicked, the evil treasure,
> and the accursed shortened *ephah?*
> Shall I absolve, despite the evil balances,
> and the sack of lying weights? (6,9–12).

If these verses are Micah's—and there is no real reason why they should not be—the rural prophet sees in the wealth of the capital city and in the means taken to get it a précis of the rottenness of Judah, just as Amos did in Israel. Another, much more dramatic, Amosian passage explores the situation in more intimate detail. Here is a heartbroken cry of desolation over a people irretrievably lost, a cannibal society feeding on itself and dismembered of its most basic and sacred ties:

> Woe is me, for I am like fruit already gathered,
> like a gleaning of the vintage;
> there is no grape to eat,

no early fig that my soul desires.
The loyal man has perished from the land,
and among men there is none upright.
All of them lie in wait for blood,
they lay snares, each man for his brother.
To do evil their hands are always ready:
the prince makes demands,
the judge rules for a price,
and the mighty make pronouncement as they please.
They have entangled the good like a thornbush,
the upright like a hedge.
The day of your watchers, your visitation has come:
now will take place their confusion!
Trust not in a friend,
confide not in a companion;
guard the gates of your mouth
from her who rests on your bosom.
For the son despises the father,
the daughter rises against the mother,
the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law,
and a man's enemies are those of his own house (7,1–6).

It is all summed up in this: "The loyal man has perished from the land." Here Micah adopts a concept dear to Hosea; the loyal man (*hasid*) is the man marked by *hesed*. In the present context there can be no doubt that the loyalty in question is that of a man to his fellows as well as to Yahweh. So it was also with Hosea. The truly pious man—and such is the meaning that *hasid* has in later biblical literature—is at the beginning a man of social justice.

Micah also calls up for special consideration the rulers of Judah, as Amos and Hosea did in Israel. The following verses from his early days of prophecy may have been addressed to the declining northern kingdom, but it is just as likely that they envisage the Israel that remained after its demise, Judah, that is to say:

Hear, then, you leaders of Jacob,
and rulers of the house of Israel!
Is it not for you to know right?
Haters of good and lovers of evil,
who flay the skin from them
and tear the flesh from their bones.
When they have eaten the flesh of my people,
and stripped their skin from them,
and exposed and disjointed their bones
like flesh in the pot and meat in the kettle,
then they cry to Yahweh!
But he will not answer them.
He will hide his face from them at that time,
because they have made their works evil (3,1–4).

A little further on, contrasting himself with the false prophets, Micah says:

But I, indeed, am filled with the spirit of Yahweh,
with power, and right, and strength,
to denounce to Jacob his transgression,
and to Israel his sin (v. 8).

This right, therefore, which is the very act and essence of rule, is the gift of Yahweh, as Amos and Hosea taught. What the leaders have ignored, and what condemns Israel's transgressions, is the revealed moral will of God.

Despite the colorful language, it is not made clear just exactly how the leaders have devoured the people. The prophet does not even determine precisely what leaders he has in mind. Another passage a few verses on makes it most likely, however, that one major crime under his eye was the grinding down of the underprivileged with the machinery of law.

Hear this, then, leaders of the house of Jacob,
and rulers of the house of Israel!
Who despise what is right
and pervert all that is upright,
who build up Zion with blood
and Jerusalem with iniquity!
Her leaders give judgment for a bribe,
her priests give instruction for hire,
and her prophets divine for money.
Yet they rely on Yahweh, saying,
"Is not Yahweh in our midst?
Evil cannot come upon us."
Thus, because of you,
Zion shall become a ploughed field,
Jerusalem shall be a heap of ruins,
and the mount of the temple
shall be a high place in the forest (3,9–12).

Judges, priests, and prophets are yoked in a common execration for having turned their offices to the ravaging of Judah, for the squalid personal gain it has brought them. The prosperity of Jerusalem is an abomination to Micah, who knows too well the human misery on which it has been founded. The magistrates have found little profit in dispensing justice, but much in their willingness to underwrite by law the ambitions of the land monopolists and the captains of Judah's industry. The vicars of Bray, too, have reacted in their perennially predictable way, obediently furnishing texts as required to bless whatever deeds their masters care to have clothed with respectability. The instruction (*torah*) given by the priests is no longer recognizable as the moral law of Israel's God; it is a *torah* shaped and accommodated to the aspirations of ruthless men who demand value for their money. The professional prophets are likewise at their old stand, purveying oracles that disturb no conscience but countenance with divine approval the conduct of a people that

can do no wrong. Like Cobbett's London, Jerusalem is a wen in which are encysted the parasites who have drained their substance from the ravaged countryside. Because of what has been done here, Jerusalem will be laid waste by a just God, and the great temple that sheltered these purchased men will have no more relevance than one of the obscure rural "high places."

4. WHAT YAHWEH REQUIRES

The Yahweh of Micah is a God of justice who appears against his people as accusing witness to convict them of their transgressions (1,2–5); he returns evil for evil according to the measure of strict justice (2,1–5; 6,13–15); in the name of justice he condemns the perversion of justice (3,9; 6,9–12; 7,1–6), as one who has a clear case in court (6,1 f.). We can say as we have before that such a message would have meant little or nothing to Micah's contemporaries had it not presupposed known moral principles and precepts long recognized as the will of Yahweh. Micah does, in fact, speak of a moral instruction that has come from Zion. The "right" in whose name he condemns Judah for its sins is the revelation of Yahweh, the standard by which rulers should have ruled and by which all should have lived.

Like his predecessors in prophecy, Micah recognizes Israel's elect status as the source of its obligation to Yahweh's moral will, to all that is expressed in "right." This is most beautifully taught in a highly dramatic passage that is fully the equal of anything to be found in Hosea, which also marvellously distils the whole of prophetic teaching. Some critics refuse to believe that the words are Micah's, chiefly because of their poetic level, which is thought to be beyond the humble prophet of Moresheth. They are, in any case, fully in the spirit of Micah.

Prophet: Hear, then, the word of Yahweh;
Yahweh speaks:

Yahweh: Arise, plead your case with the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice!
Prophet: Hear, O mountains, Yahweh's case,
and give ear, you foundations of the earth;
for Yahweh has a case against his people,
and with Israel will he hold trial.
Yahweh: O my people, what have I done to you,
and how have I wearied you? Answer me!
For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and from the house of slavery I delivered you.
And I sent Moses before you,
Aaron and Miriam with him.
What was the plan of Balak, king of Moab?
and what was the answer of Balaam ben Beor?
Remember, then, from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know Yahweh's righteous deeds.
People: How shall I come before Yahweh,
humble myself before the God of heights?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams,
with myriads of rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
Prophet: It has been told you, O man, what is good,
and what Yahweh requires of you:
What else, but to do right, to love loyally,
and to walk humbly with your God? (6,1–8).

These verses contain a complete theology of sin and righteousness. In them we can discern Amos' idea of the role of justice as the divinely constituted order of the universe, which Hosea related to the divine love, and as well the Isaianic notion of faith in Yahweh that opposes human self-sufficiency. It is not really unlikely that

the unsophisticated Micah should give us such a synthesis as this, for both the form and content of this passage existed in Near Eastern and Israelitic tradition before there were prophets.

The figure of Yahweh as a pleader in court is already familiar to us, and it is common enough in the Old Testament (cf. Dt 32; Pss 50; 82; Is 1,2–20; 3,13–15; 41,21–29; 44,6–8; Jer 2,4–13). It may be that it draws on a liturgical usage, the symbolic representation of "the day of Yahweh," perhaps at the periodical renewal of the covenant, when Israel would be summoned to account and catechized on its fidelity to duty. Also a liturgical theme, probably, is the introduction of the mountains and deeps of the earth, conceived as having witnessed the covenant between God and people and therefore qualified to judge the merits of this case. The invocation of such witnesses appears to have been standard procedure in the ratification of Near Eastern covenants. "The mountains, the rivers, the springs, the great Sea, heaven and earth, the winds and the clouds—let these be witnesses to this treaty and to the oath": so runs the conclusion to the covenant of a Hittite king with a Hurrian vassal written a century before the Israelite invasion of Canaan under Joshua.

Though Yahweh indicts Judah, he does not detail its crimes; rather, he pleads his own righteous deeds that should have evoked a like response from his people, but had not. The *Popule meus, quid feci tibi?* that we find so moving in our Good Friday ritual was designed to produce the same effect in the covenant assemblies of Israel. Recitals of this kind, recalling the events of the Exodus, the frustration of Balak and Balaam (Nm 22–24), the crossing of the Jordan from Shittim to Gilgal (Jos 3 f.), and the other wonders that Yahweh had worked for his people (cf. Dt 6,20–24; 26,5–9; Jos 24,2–13), were the seed from which grew the more discursive narrations that have made up the Pentateuchal story. What Yahweh had done—his righteousness—was the norm of what Israel should do.

Without this reciprocal righteousness, there was no returning to Yahweh in meaningless sacrifices, forms with no spirit. Cer-

tainly there could be no return in the foul and loathsome Gentile rites like the sacrifice of the firstborn introduced under Ahaz (2 Kgs 16,3). The almost matter-of-fact mention of this dread practice in the same breath with the comparatively innocent, if pointless, animal sacrifices and oil lustrations would be more chilling to us had we not experienced in our own times the ease with which even advanced civilizations can revert to barbarism, which can be called by very holy names. Because of what Yahweh had made Israel through the Exodus, the covenant, and his continued acts of grace, the people had always known in their heart of hearts how they must approach this God of goodness and love. "It has been told you what is good," cries Micah.

And what had Yahweh made known as Israel's covenant duty? First of all, "to do right," the prophet replies, echoing Amos' favorite formula. Secondly, "to love loyally," which capsulizes the thought of Hosea. We have seen that *hesed*, the dutiful love that is central in Hosea's thinking, is also a moral idea for Micah, who calls the just and upright man *hasid*. In Hosea, Yahweh's gratuitous love was seen as the origin and basis of the covenant which he made with Israel. In this expression, "to love loyally," both ideas, of love and of duty, are combined; *hesed* determines and specifies the love that Israel must return to Yahweh—his people must love as he loves, manifesting their love in *hesed*. Micah does not only say that just dealing is Yahweh's will for human society, nor only that love of neighbor is the measure of one's love for God; he insists that justice and love are inseparably one, that social justice is an act of love. Only in such love may one "walk humbly with God," for communion with God is impossible without communion with the neighbor.

Once again we are confronted with a moral teaching that is religious rather than ethical, and Israelitic throughout. Its obligations are not founded in man's dignity nor in his rights as an individual or even as a social being, but in his quality as belonging to a society related to God. Yahweh's "righteous deeds" that brought this society into being and sustained it were acts of his

love. The righteousness that must characterize such a society, the "right" by which it must live, could likewise be motivated only by love.

Because the people had forgotten who they were, because they had forgotten the nature of their relation to Yahweh, room had been made for the corruption, oppression, greed, and rugged individualism of a new society in which the powerful could destroy the weak. Because the people had forgotten Yahweh, they had forgotten one another. There was left only the disastrous combination of egotism and private property.

5. YAHWEH THE SAVIOR

I pointed out in the textual note above that modern critical opinion is by no means unanimous in accepting Micah's "messianic" section (cc. 4–5) as the work of our prophet. Now such questions, of course, are not to be solved simply by counting noses, even critical noses. Neither, however, is critical opinion quite the arbitrary and capricious thing it may sometimes appear to the layman, who is ordinarily informed only that "the critics have changed their mind" without having more than a nodding acquaintance with the premises and method that have gone into the change. The serious student of the Bible knows that he can disregard the judgment of criticism only by being arbitrary and capricious himself. More, he could have no genuine interest in the historical revelation that the Bible contains, were he contemptuous of the means that much painful trial and error have convinced us are indispensable in getting at historical fact. He cannot acquit himself of this responsibility by pleading the transcendent worth of the biblical word that is independent of author, date, and other circumstances. That there is such a thing in the Bible, no one will deny, but the history of revealed religion is not the same as a collection of transcendent truths.

In the case at hand, whereas earlier critics would have unhesitatingly found in these passages reflections of later Jewish think-

ing, it is the trend of more recent criticism to allow their compatibility with an eighth-century setting, and, if so, as conceivably Micah's as any other's. What has made the difference is simply the continuing patient study of Israel's religious history and the consequent revision of various theories and reconstructions. Also, much more attention has been devoted to certain factors—the antiquity and pervading influence of the Israelitic cult, for one—that were hardly touched by the older criticism—if for no other reason than that criticism can do only so much at a given time. And of course, the more the Bible has been read and pondered, the more we have learnt and unlearnt about it, since change is the condition of human knowledge. Especially in this last regard, I believe a good case can now be made for these chapters as containing Micah's messianic doctrine.

Micah based his condemnation of the existing Judah on its rejection of its destiny as Yahweh's people and its effective negation of his salvific purposes in giving them the promised land; this is clearly the teaching of 2,6–10, whose Mican authorship is acknowledged by everyone. He obviously believed that in consequence of these crimes the existing Judah was to be wiped out. Unlike Amos, however, he was not so much preoccupied with the outraged justice of Yahweh that must be vindicated utterly as he was with the thought that God's plan had been frustrated, a terrible fact but not necessarily an irrevocable one. Amos only halfheartedly accepted the notion of the remnant, as a possibility in which he had little interest, but Micah fully shared with Hosea and Isaiah the conviction that the divine love is proof against all human malice and must be victor over it.

In this design, the oracles of Mi 4–5 certainly have a place. This is not to deny that they have undergone later revision and some supplementation—4,6–9, for example, look very much as though they come from a time after Jerusalem's capture and the exile, and the reference to Babylon in 4,10 is obviously from a later period—but there is no reason to reject their substance outright. The first part of c. 4 expresses just the kind of messianic hope

that we would suppose Micah to have had. It tells of the restoration of the land that will be Yahweh's work, a work that will reverse all the evil proclivities of the Judah in which the prophet lived.

Micah, we have seen, was perturbed by the new conception of property that concentrated wealth in the hands of a few and relegated the rest of the population to the status of helpless dependents —or better, he was perturbed at the vicious advantage that had been taken of the new situation in demolishing the ancient social safeguards of Judahite life. This put him in conflict with Judah's recently acquired commercialism. Commerce itself was not, of course, in question; even a Judahite peasant knew that commerce was part of civilized living and that it had been a feature of Israelite life since society had become sedentary. Commerce was not in question, but the commercial spirit was, the spirit that was transforming Judah into a society like that of the Tyrian Canaanites. What Theodore Robinson accurately observed of Amos sums up Micah's attitude as well: "The supreme failure was not that Israel had learnt to plough and Samaria to trade, but that neither had seen that Yahweh was concerned in both activities."[3]

Micah, however, like all the prophets and like all Semites, thought concretely and existentially, not in abstractions. We must not expect to find him distinguishing an ideal commercialism (which, of course, did not and does not exist) from the commercialism that was the brutal fact of Babylon, Phoenicia, and now Judah. Whatever could be said of commercialism in the abstract—and Micah says nothing—the fact was that Judah's present ills were consequent on its transition to commercial life. It was this that had swallowed up the industry of a free peasantry, whom it had left hopeless debtors, bondsmen, without rights in a land once their own. In condemning the evil as he found it, it was logical for Micah to think of a better future in terms of a return to the simpler past.

The oracle in which this thought is expressed probably comes from the time of Hezekiah, either after Judah had been spared

[3] *Prophecy and the Prophets* (London: Duckworth, 1923), p. 68.

from the Assyrian flood that had swept Israel away, or after Yahweh's miraculous intervention that had saved Jerusalem from Sennacherib's army. It begins:

> It shall come about in the latter days
> that the mountain of Yahweh's house
> will be raised up highest of all the mountains,
> and placed above the hills.
> And peoples shall stream to it:
> many nations will come, saying,
> "Let us go up to Yahweh's mountain,
> to the house of the God of Jacob,
> that he may teach us his ways,
> that we may walk in his paths."
> For from Zion will go forth instruction (*torah*),
> and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem (4,1–2).

These two verses and the following one which speaks of a universal peace after Yahweh's "judgment of the nations" are found identically in Is 2,2–4. We need not wonder whether Micah has borrowed from his contemporary Isaiah or whether it was the other way round; far likelier is it that both prophets got the poem from the same source. That source, scholars nowadays have come more and more to suspect, was the liturgy of the Jerusalem temple. A liturgical origin is presumable for most of these themes that were to inspire the later apocalyptic—Zion the goal of the nations, the coming great day of Yahweh, and a descriptive language that tends to the mythical in its idealization. Apocalyptic came into its own only at the end of the Old Testament period when special circumstances encouraged its proliferation, but its roots were already here, among the prophets, who shared—though always with some reservations—the expectation of a Yahwistic triumph of universal significance.

Amos also heard Yahweh thundering from Jerusalem to judge

the nations of his world. However, he allowed the popular eschatology of a glorious future to play no role in his prophecy, so intent was he on reading Israel its coming doom. Hosea, on the other hand, did prophesy a future of universal peace. And the prophet Zephaniah, we shall see, likewise placed that future, as it is placed here, following Yahweh's judgment of the nations.

Micah has used the poem to introduce his own, much more prosaic, prospect of a happy tomorrow, which occurs in v. 4:

> Every man will sit beneath his own vine,
> and beneath his own fig tree,
> and there will be none to terrify him;
> for the mouth of Yahweh Sebaoth will have spoken.

"Yahweh Sebaoth" was an invocation also traditional in the Jerusalem liturgy; we shall see it featured in the temple vision of Isaiah's sixth chapter. But this verse is Micah's own, it is not liturgical. The figure of the vine and fig tree in 1 Kgs 5,5 epitomizes the peace and prosperity of the Solomonic age; in 2 Kgs 18,31 it is part of a promise of peace and security made in Israelitic language to the men of Jerusalem by Sennacherib's envoy; and in Zech 3,10 it again occurs in a messianic context. There is no doubt, therefore, that it was a well-known byword indicative of the earthly ideals of a people among whom ownership of the land had been the all-important condition of happiness and well-being. Micah says that Yahweh's intervention will bring about that each man possesses his own measure of property (and only his own) sufficient to his needs, so that he will no more be prey to the injustices that dominated the prophet's Judah. This is, in peasant language, the prediction of the restoration of Israel.

Another passage of these messianic chapters can easily be ascribed to Micah; it, too, is very much at home in his thinking. It most probably belongs to a time somewhat earlier than the preceding, if the preceding dates from after Sennacherib. The cir-

cumstances best suited to the utterance of this oracle would be those of Jerusalem in state of siege by Sennacherib.

> Now you are fenced in, Beth-gader!
> They have laid siege against us.
> With a rod they smite on the cheek
> the ruler of Israel (4,14).

The first line has to be reconstructed. If this reconstruction is correct, Micah calls Jerusalem "house of the rampart," possibly in allusion to the extensive defence works constructed under Hezekiah. The reference is ironical, contrasting the great walled city with the tiny Beth-Ephrathah he is about to mention. Behind the rampart of Jerusalem cowers the king, the ruler (*shofet*, "judge") of Israel, in fear of the Assyrians. "Hezekiah I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage," Sennacherib was to boast in his own records of the siege. The oracle continues:

> But you, house of Ephrathah,
> smallest of all the clans of Judah,
> from you will come forth for me
> one who is to be ruler (*moshel*) in Israel,
> whose origin is from of old,
> from ancient days (5,1).

Not only is the little clan of Ephrathah set in opposition to mighty Jerusalem, so is the king reigning in Jerusalem set in opposition to a king to come, whose qualities appear in v. 3 below. He comes of an ancient line. The prophet means the Davidic dynasty, to which Yahweh had promised an everlasting succession (2 Sm 7,5–16; Ps 89). David himself had not been a member of the Ephrathite clan, but the clan had given its name to his native city of Bethlehem (Ru 1,2; 4,11), and in this sense he is called an

Ephrathite by 1 Sm 17,12. The geographical Ephrathah is actually what the prophet has in mind here: the insignificant Judahite village of Bethlehem that was nevertheless the birthplace of the great king. Though "Bethlehem" was probably not in the original text of Mi 5,1, therefore, it is of Bethlehem that the prophet speaks.[4] Micah does not say, necessarily, that the coming king will actually be born in Bethlehem, but that he will come from Ephrathah, that is, from the Davidic line of Bethlehem. The application given this verse in Mt 2,6 understands a later and developed Jewish interpretation of it that is more precise than anything the prophet intended.

This is a prophecy of "royal messianism," the first that we have encountered in the prophets. (The references to a future Davidic king in Amos and Hosea we have considered, with the majority of commentators, to be later additions to their texts.) It is, however, royal messianism with a specific character of its own, as one may speedily verify if he will compare it with the "royal" messianic psalms, namely, Pss 2, 45, 72, and 110. There, in these works of inspired court poets, we find an enthusiasm for the royal dignity that is quite lacking in Micah. They describe the coming vindicator in a way calculated to fire the Israelite imagination with awe and national pride, employing all the motifs of magnificence and power with which the ancient Near East was able to surround the institution of royalty.

Micah, it will be noted, calls neither the reigning king nor the king of the future by the royal title, though it is clear that he is speaking of a king in both instances. Instead, he uses two different words for "ruler," old words from the Israelite past signifying authority, but not strictly royal. This usage is undoubtedly studied, showing a direction taken by other prophets as well, notably by Isaiah, as we shall see, and Ezekiel. Though all these prophets were Judahites who accepted the prerogatives of the Davidic dynasty and relied on the promise to be fulfilled through it, they tend to

[4] Doubtless the original reading was *beth Ephrathah*, that is, "house of Ephrathah." The *beth* encouraged someone to gloss in the name of Bethlehem, accounting for the present "Bethlehem-Ephrathah."

spiritualize the kingly ideal in a way that the royal psalms do not. The kingship, after all, had proved to be far from an unmixed blessing for either Israel or Judah. The long record of the kings was more one of inept and errant leadership than of what would have been expected of Yahweh's anointed representatives. Micah has upbraided the leaders of Judah quite as bitterly as Hosea and Amos did those of Israel, and as bitterly again we shall hear Isaiah uniting his voice with Micah's. Hence, though the prophet looks for a king to fulfil the hopes of "royal messianism," he sees him less a king than Yahweh's instrument. This is made even plainer in v. 3:

He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of Yahweh,
in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God.
They shall remain, for now he shall be great
even to the ends of the earth.
And he will be peace.

Micah falls back on another Near Eastern figure, that of the shepherd—a ruler, but one who rules with kindness and only for the good of the flock. The themes of majesty and of universal domination that are the commonplaces of the royal psalms are also found here, but they are muffled in the far more pronounced accent laid on the personality of the awaited one as Yahweh's shepherd. Readers of the New Testament do not have to be reminded that it was with the gentle shepherd that Jesus Christ identified himself, in preference to the conquering king of the royal psalms.

"He will be peace," Micah affirms. "Christ is our peace," says St. Paul; "he has made peace through the death of the cross" (cf. Eph 2,14–16). Micah surely had no adequate idea of what would be the ultimate fulfilment of these words, but that fulfilment he foresaw in principle. *Shalom*, "peace," is one of the most highly charged of all biblical words; it can almost be translated "salvation," for it implies full unity and harmony with God as well as

with man. All that the kings of Judah had not been, all that they had failed to be in betraying the high destiny that Yahweh had assigned them, would be found in the Davidic shepherd who was to come.

When did Micah expect this shepherd to come? Who did he think that he would be? These are questions to which he provides no certain answers. In the verse immediately preceding, after the annunciation of the coming ruler, he adds:

> Therefore [Yahweh] will give [Judah] up till the time
> when she who is in labor will have borne;
> then the rest of his brethren will return
> to the children of Israel (v. 2).

Some have thought, in view of a similarity of language, that there is an allusion here to Isaiah's famous oracle of the Immanuel (Is 7,14). It is possible. Isaiah's words were spoken at the time of the Syro-Ephraimite threat, some thirty years before the presumed date of Micah's. But again, I think it more probable that both Micah and Isaiah share a common messianic viewpoint with a common conceptual background, which we shall have to examine when we read Isaiah's oracles in the next chapter. Like Isaiah, Micah brings the mother of the messianic ruler into relief, but again like Isaiah, he just as quickly places the whole event in an aura of mystery. To Isaiah she is the *almah*, "the young woman," and to Micah *yoledah*, "she who is in labor." I do not believe that the prophet could have intended to determine her or the ruler himself, as to time or person. He was voicing an ancient belief, itself an act of faith in the saving mercy of Yahweh. He testified to that belief in the face of a threat to Judah which, he knew too well, presaged an even greater ruin.

Micah, the humble Moreshethite, is thus a prophet to whom we are in debt not only for the vision of God's justice, but also of his mercy. He has combined, in a fashion, some of the best teaching

of both Amos and Hosea. When we study the prophecy of Isaiah we shall see how he has also complemented this greatest, perhaps, of all the prophets. To Micah the will of Yahweh was revealed chiefly against the backdrop of the countryside of Judah pillaged by the rural landlords. To Isaiah it was revealed mainly in the apostasy and intrigue of Jerusalem. But both prophets saw one Yahweh whose will was to save his people even despite themselves, who had the power to accomplish this beyond every human expectation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Isaiah ben Amoz

A NOTE ON THE TEXT OF ISAIAH'S PROPHECIES

In this book we are concerned with only the first thirty-nine chapters of the Book of Isaiah. Catholic scholars now generally agree with the common critical judgment that cc. 40–55 are the work of another prophet who lived perhaps a century and a half after Isaiah, while cc. 56–66 are later yet, produced by still another prophet or group of prophets. The critics customarily call these latter two sections, faute de mieux, *"Deutero-Isaiah" and "Trito-Isaiah," respectively. It is unfortunate that we do not know the names of the authors responsible for them, who surely wrote some of the most beautiful pages of the Old Testament. The fact that they were, in many ways, continuers of the Isaianic message accounts for their having been brought into conjunction with the great Isaiah. As anyone can readily see on reading them, however, the perspective of these chapters is quite different from that of the eighth-century prophet; and this itself, even apart from the question of authorship, would exclude them from our present study.*

Moreover, not everything in cc. 1–39 belongs to the prophet Isaiah, for no other prophetic book of the Old Testament has had such a complex history as this one. The explanations of the scholars to account for its formation are many, and often are rather diverse.

In cc. 1–5 there is a collection of prophecies, most of which appear to belong to Isaiah's earliest ministry, though they are in topical rather than any chronological order. With the exception of a verse here and there, or part of a verse, all these words are certainly Isaiah's. The two titles, in 1,1 and 2,1, show that the collection results from prior gatherings of the prophet's oracles.

With c. 6, the first-person account of Isaiah's vision in the temple, begins a section that extends to the end of c. 8, devoted to the events of the Syro-Ephraimite war. Originally, this may have been the beginning of the Isaianic collection, made by the prophet himself (though c. 7 is in the third person). To this section have been added cc. 9–12, a collection of oracles also deriving mainly from Isaiah's earlier period. His authorship of some verses in this collection is often questioned, but no very extensive passages are involved. This larger section, from c. 6 to c. 12, is customarily called "The Book of Immanuel," because of the messianic figure whom it features.

Cc. 13–23 form a collection of oracles against foreign nations. Considerable portions of this collection must be attributed to later authorship, including the long series of poems in 13,1–14,23 against Babylon, which belongs to "Deutero-Isaiah." Other parts are questionable: 19,16–25 concerning Egypt is certainly late, and the preceding part of the chapter may also be; 21,1–10, again on the fall of Babylon, is certainly later.

Cc. 24–27, the so-called "Apocalypse of Isaiah," are generally thought to be the most recent of all the additions to the Isaianic collection, later than even "Trito-Isaiah." The section is not a unity but is itself a collection of the work of an unknown writer who is believed to have flourished in the Persian period of Israelite history, that is, after the resettlement in Palestine following 535 B.C. *and before the Hellenist conquest in 333* B.C.

The remaining parts of cc. 1–39 that are Isaiah's belong to the latter period of his ministry. Aside from a few minor additions, there is no reason to question his authorship of the material contained in cc. 28–32. But c. 33 is possibly of a later date, as are cc.

34–35 which depend on Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah. The historical supplement in cc. 36–39 has been borrowed from 2 Kgs 18,13–20,19.

1. THE ISAIAN AGE

We have Isaiah's own word, in his account of a vision that was his call to prophecy, that his prophetic mission began "in the year that king Uzziah died" (6,1). This would have been about 740 B.C. The title in Is 1,1, therefore, doubtless correctly sets him within the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The date of his death is unknown, and there is no particular reason to believe the late Jewish tradition according to which he was murdered by Manasseh. But it is otherwise certain that he lived through Hezekiah's reign, or most of it; he disappears from history almost precisely with the end of the eighth century. Isaiah consequently binds together within his lifespan in a rather unique way the first great age of literary prophecy. He was a boy, perhaps already a young man, when Amos was prophesying in Israel; he had probably begun his life's work while Hosea was still active in his; he was certainly already prophesying when Micah appeared on the scene, and, most probably, he continued after Micah had uttered his final oracle.

We can see from Isaiah's work that he exerted considerable influence on the political life of his country and that he had more than casual acquaintance with the policies and politicians of Judah. In this he was distinguished, as far as we know, from the other prophets of the eighth century. His Hebrew, easily the best in the prophetic writings, betrays the man of cultivation and family background. The rabbinical tradition, however, that credits him with royal blood may be dismissed as guesswork. Apparently he had a circle of disciples gathered about him (cf. 8,16–18); in this, too, he seems to have differed from the rest of the eighth-century prophets. To these disciples we are doubtless to ascribe the collection and publication of his prophetic oracles, and the continuation

of their message in numerous additions and supplements. Despite these and other facts incidentally revealed in his work, however, when all is said and done we know relatively little of Isaiah's personal history. In his own writings there is little biographical material properly so called, and like most of the prophets he has almost completely submerged himself in giving voice to the word communicated by the Spirit.

The political situation in the Judah that was the scene of Isaiah's prophecies we have in part already seen in the preceding chapter. Isaiah began his prophetic career with the avowal that he lived "among a people of unclean lips" (6,5). What this meant, as concerns the times of Jotham and Ahaz, we have already learnt from Micah. Isaiah makes it very clear that the evil conditions of those times were also the inheritance of the reign of the pious Hezekiah. On the one hand, this confirms the relevance of some of Micah's words to the Hezekian age. It also illustrates how perennially true it is that reform is not effected through legislation alone, nor by official proclamation, but only through a sincere change in men's thinking and acting.

In the Book of Kings, Hezekiah receives greater attention than that given to any other Judahite king. This is true partly because of the author's interest in Isaiah, who figures so much in the story, but chiefly because Hezekiah realized the ideal of the Deuteronomist historical school responsible for Kings. The northern kingdom, we have seen, had fallen probably a short time before Hezekiah's reign began. The fate of the north, as an object lesson, helped persuade the young king to follow Isaiah's advice to carry out reform in Judah, which he instituted in his first years. The temple was cleansed of the Assyrian trappings introduced by Ahaz and was rededicated to the service of Yahweh, the cult was re-established, and the people were reconsecrated to Yahweh in a renewal of the covenant affirmations. The return of the nation officially to Yahwism undoubtedly entailed an attempt, at least, to remedy the grave social and moral abuses denounced by Micah and Isaiah.

Biblical tradition credits Hezekiah with the innovation of new

regulations in the cult (cf. 2 Ch 31). One such measure was the attempt to suppress the local sanctuaries, the "high places" where idolatry and religious syncretism had flourished, and to centralize all public worship in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18,4). This was the beginning of the Deuteronomic reform, which came to full term under Josiah in the time of Jeremiah. Many scholars believe that it was now that the Book of Deuteronomy was composed in approximately its present form; the legal part of the book is thought to have been the Mosaic lawcode used in the north and brought to Jerusalem after the fall of Samaria. According to 2 Ch 30 the Israelites of the north were invited by Hezekiah to participate in the Jerusalem cult. This is one of the indications that the population of the north remained basically Israelite; it may also indicate that the kings of Judah served, perhaps unofficially, as governors of conquered Samaria for the Assyrians. As part of the nationalistic and Yahwistic revival under Hezekiah, there was evidently a movement to stabilize and preserve Israelitic tradition. Prv 25,1 indicates that parts of the ancient wisdom literature were collected and written down at this time. Probably, too, the northern and southern versions of the Mosaic Pentateuchal traditions were now gathered and stabilized, in the beginning of a literary effort that would finally produce, along with the Deuteronomic effort, the historical books of the Old Testament.

During this time Hezekiah carefully avoided giving open affront to the all-powerful Assyrian empire, of which he remained technically the vassal. In this as in his other policies he was governed by the advice which Isaiah had lavished on Ahaz in vain. If there should be a temptation to think of the prophetic spirit as an idealism untempered by practicality, the example of Isaiah's influence on Hezekiah should help dispel it. Largely from this influence was it that there was "none like him among all the kings of Judah after him (nor among those who were before him)," for "he trusted in Yahweh, the God of Israel" (2 Kgs 18,5).

If both king and court were inclined to follow Isaiah's counsels, however, other powerful influences were also at work which

partly coincided with the prophetic, but which were later to mean disaster for Judah. Though it was at Isaiah's prompting that Hezekiah drew away from Assyria, it was also at the prompting of the pro-Egyptian party, which continually urged political alliance with the broken reed of the Nile and public repudiation of the Assyrian yoke. If Isaiah's moderation long prevailed over these extremists, it is also true that Sargon's relatively mild demands on Judah were not calculated to provoke Hezekiah into precipitate action. After the sack of Samaria and the destruction of a final desperate coalition of Israelites and Arameans somewhat later in a battle at Qarqar (not mentioned in the Bible but recorded in Sargon's annals found at Khorsabad), the Great King had come no more into Palestine, but had been content to take his tribute without interference in the internal affairs of his subject states. Hezekiah paid his tribute faithfully, and when in 711 Sargon finally had to invade Philistia to beat down a coalition of Philistines and Egyptians (cf. Is 20), the way that Judah figures in the Assyrian annals shows that though Hezekiah had obviously been tempted to join the alliance, he had at the last managed to satisfy the Assyrians of his loyalty. That his policy had been at least ambiguous, however, is testimony to the strength of the Egyptianizing appeal. Though he seems to have ended by aiding the Assyrians (cf. 2 Kgs 18,8), yet he was preparing for the revolt that he finally made, building up his treasury and stores (cf. 2 Kgs 20,13), refortifying Jerusalem and assembling an arsenal (2 Ch 32,5), and securing the city against siege by the construction of the famous aqueduct that is still a marvel to the tourist in Jerusalem, leading from the spring Gihon into the walled city (cf. 2 Ch 32,4.30; 2 Kgs 20,20).

These measures, however politically shrewd, were not dictated by the same Yahwistic faith that had inspired the reform. Isaiah condemned them all, and the implied reliance on Egypt, as illusory and deceitful (cf. 28,14–18; 30, 1–5.6 f.; 31,1–3). But a substantial part of the nation evidently approved them, and by the same token would have had at best a lukewarm interest in the Yahwistic enthusiasms of the king. By whatever combination of causes, the

sequel to Hezekiah was the naked heathenism of Manasseh. This reaction does not argue that Judah had ever returned to Yahweh with conviction.

In 705 Sargon II was murdered, and only after some confusion did the reins of empire fall into the hands of Sennacherib. This interregnal disorganization, not an unwonted thing in the annals of the Great Kings, was as usual a signal for subject peoples to try, if they dared, to regain their freedom before the new king could consolidate his power. In the East rose a man named Mardukapaliddina, called in the Bible Merodach-baladan. Long a champion of Babylonian nationalism against Assyria, he now undertook to rally other dissident peoples for an all-out rebellion, soliciting the aid of even tiny states like Judah (cf. 2 Kgs 20,12–15). By 702 Hezekiah was no longer able to resist the pressure of his pro-Egyptian and anti-Assyrian advisers. He joined Egypt at last in open rebellion against Assyria.

The exact sequence of events that followed is not too clear; there is some difficulty in harmonizing the biblical with the Assyrian accounts, and there are many gaps in both. But the essential facts are all too brutally plain. Sennacherib proceeded methodically and efficiently, first neutralizing Merodach-baladan's power and occupying Babylon, then marching to deal with his enemies in the West. Egypt proved to be a worthless ally, even as Isaiah had predicted. In 701 Sennacherib was at Lachish in Palestine, having already devastated Philistia and much of Judah. Some of the best-known Near Eastern art now extant are the huge reliefs (approximately ten feet tall), discovered at Nineveh in 1849 and now a prize display of the Assyrian collection in the British Museum, on which Sennacherib graphically pictured his siege, capture, and plundering of Lachish. Bone arrowheads found in the excavations of Lachish between 1932 and 1938 are mute testimony to the resistance of its inhabitants long after their metal had given out. After his success at Lachish, Sennacherib demanded the surrender of Jerusalem, as is told in the lifelike detail of 2 Kgs 18,13–19,37 (Is 36–37).

Many modern scholars think that the biblical story has compressed two campaigns of Sennacherib into one, but they are not sure how to disentangle them. At any rate, the campaign of 701 is confirmed most explicitly in Sennacherib's annals, which contain the particulars of the tribute paid by Hezekiah—incidentally giving an indication of the wealth of the Judahite court and the extent of its foreign trade. In one of the rooms of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh the archeologists found a heroic relief representing the king's attack on an unknown city, which some scholars believe to have been Jerusalem. The annals, however, contain Sennacherib's tacit admission that he had been unable to capture Judah's capital city. The account of the destruction of his army before Jerusalem's walls, presumably by a plague (2 Kgs 19,35), may describe the end of a second campaign, around 689. At all events, Judah and Jerusalem suffered grievously from Sennacherib. Hezekiah's tribute was increased, and his kingdom was to remain subject the rest of his days. Nothing further is said about him; the biblical story now stops abruptly.

It is difficult to assess the significance of Sennacherib's invasion in terms of its effect on Israelite religion. Did the people of Judah look on Hezekiah as a victor, vindicated by Yahweh, since he had at least saved Jerusalem from the wrath of the Great King? Seemingly the Book of Kings wants to suggest this view. I think, also, that in the preceding chapter we were able to find a convincing setting for various of Micah's messianic oracles in the enthusiasm that presumably followed on Sennacherib's withdrawal. But in the long run, it is doubtful that this optimism could have been very enduring. In point of cold fact, Judah had been desolated, and it would have been hard to deny that Hezekiah's politics were to blame. It is therefore quite likely that a reaction set in against all that he had stood for—we recall again Manasseh's easy success in repaganizing the state—just as there would later be a reaction against the Yahwistic policies of Josiah following his defeat and death at Megiddo. If Isaiah's first chapter belongs, as some believe, to this period after Sennacherib, we find that he left in his wake

a land filled with every vice that had been decried by the prophets, formalistic in its religion and cynical in its immorality.

2. THE CORRUPTION OF JUDAH

We have dwelt on the history of Hezekiah because it is so much a part of Isaiah's—so true is this, that we may forget that Isaiah belongs as much, if not more, to the times of Jotham and Ahaz that preceded Hezekiah. We should first consider Isaiah's testimony to these times, which is in striking confirmation of Micah's, then try to reconstruct the role that the prophet played in this history.

Isaiah displays a Judah of unbridled, irresponsible luxury, a sensate society without thought for the spirit, divine or human.

> His land is filled with silver and gold,
> and without end are his treasures;
> his land is filled with horses,
> and without end are his chariots (2,7).

Foreign commerce had transformed Judah from a pastoral kingdom into a reflection of the Solomonic glory. But Judah was likewise filled with superstition (v. 6) and idolatry (v. 8) which, along with its wealth, it had drawn from its contacts with the Philistines and other merchant peoples. Its wealth, therefore, Isaiah sees simply as another symptom of a towering human pride that has put its confidence in itself to the total disregard of the only God. Hence it is that, amid all the other evincements of this pride that Yahweh will surely bring low, are the merchant "ships of Tarshish" that have brought Judah its wealth (v. 16).

Whatever may have been the time when they were actually spoken, the words that now stand at the beginning of Isaiah's prophecy are the leitmotiv of his consistent judgment on Judah:

Hear, O heavens, give ear, O earth,
for Yahweh speaks.
"Sons I have gotten and reared,
but they have rebelled against me.
The ox knows its owner,
and the ass its master's stall,
but Israel does not know,
my people does not understand."
Woe, sinful nation!
people great with iniquity,
wicked race,
children of corruption!
They have deserted Yahweh,
despised the Holy of Israel (1,2–4).

He is able to describe this uncomprehending people in language very much like that which Amos used of Israel:

Woe to those who rise early in the morning
to seek out strong drink,
who sit late into the evening
while wine inflames them.
Their feasts are all lyre and harp,
timbrel and pipe, and wine;
the deeds of Yahweh they perceive not,
the work of his hands they do not see.
Thus my people go into exile for lack of knowledge,
their great ones shrunken with hunger,
their commoners dried up with thirst (5,11–13).

A guilty ignorance of duty and responsibility has condemned this people and made their sensuous revelings not merely futile

but criminal. It has prevented the proud, thoughtless men of Judah from reading the signs of the times, remembering Yahweh's past interventions in history and recognizing, therefore, the inexorability of his judgment on this people that has so utterly squandered its heritage. The "knowledge" of which Isaiah speaks can scarcely be different from Hosea's "knowledge of God," that is, the practical experience of Yahweh that consists in living according to the model that he has revealed in himself. For lack of this knowledge, these lives that should have been Yahweh's are inviting judgment.

Woe to those who trail iniquity with cords of falsehood,
  sin as with the traces of a cart,
who say, "Let him hasten,
  let him hurry his work that we may see it.
Let it draw near, let it arrive,
  the plan of the Holy of Israel, that we may know it."
Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil,
  who change darkness into light and light into darkness,
  who change bitter into sweet and sweet into bitter.
Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,
  prudent according to themselves alone.
Woe to the heroic drinkers of wine,
  the men mighty at mixing strong drink,
who acquit the wicked in exchange for a bribe,
  while they withhold the vindication of the innocent.
Therefore, as the fiery tongue consumes chaff,
  as hay collapses in the flame,
their root shall become like rottenness,
  their blossom shall rise up as dust;
for they have despised the law of Yahweh Sebaoth,
  and the word of the Holy of Israel they have scorned (5,18–24).

Conceptually, this oracle is closely related to Isaiah's temple vision of c. 6. Here and elsewhere when he refers explicitly to the

torah of Yahweh Sebaoth, the word of the Holy of Israel, he apparently has in mind a moral teaching that emanates from the Jerusalem temple, the scene of Yahweh's presence. In the name of this law, the norm of the knowledge that was expected of Judahites, the prophet condemns the corrupt judges who had made a mockery of the administration of justice.

For the moment we can confine our attention to his continuation of the description of the misuse of wealth in fine living, born of an arrogance that has made self-gratification rather than the divine will the only law of life. This arrogance has found its outlet in many ways, to be the basic explanation of all of Judah's woes. With bitter sarcasm the prophet calls down woe on those who (as in Am 9,10; Mi 3,11) have become so stolid in their self-confidence as to yearn for Yahweh's intervention in divine judgment, unaware that his judgment can only mean their destruction. They are among the enemies whom he must surely bring to naught on that day of his settling of accounts, when his plan for the world he created has come to its end. For Yahweh is no Gentile deity whose desires on his people can be satisfied with mouth-honor and formal praise. Good and evil are not decided by the will and wilfulness of man, but by the moral will of Israel's God.

We are hardly surprised that Isaiah can attack the luxury-loving women of Jerusalem with the same vituperation that Amos scornfully poured out on the Bashan cows of Samaria:

> Yahweh has said: Because they are haughty,
> these daughters of Zion,
> and walk with necks stretched high,
> enticing with their eyes,
> moving with mincing steps,
> jangling their anklets,
> the Lord will strike their heads with baldness,
> these daughters of Zion,
> Yahweh will lay bare their secret parts (3,16 f.).

Thus the anger of a man of God revolted by coquetry in the cesspool. In requital of their having made an amusing profession of their sex, these *nouvelles riches*, their beauty blasted, will serve the unfastidious lusts of invading soldiers. Their Decameronic wantonness is another symptom of the pride of Judah; the product of too much good living that has been taken for granted and submitted to no enquiry. The catalogue of feminine frills and fripperies that follows, some refuse to think is Isaiah's own. If it is not his, it is certainly the work of someone who completely shared his feelings:

> In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of anklets, spangles, crescents, earrings, bracelets, veils, coronets, arm bands, sashes, scent boxes, amulets, finger rings, nose rings, gowns, mantles, shawls, purses, laces, linens, turbans, and large veils (vv. 18–23).

In the day of Yahweh's wrath there will be rottenness instead of perfume, ropes instead of sashes, and sackcloth instead of fine robes (v. 24). These women will deem themselves fortunate if they can but share with others the favors and protection of a husband, providing themselves their own food and clothing (4,1). A similar warning is read to the women of Jerusalem in the later 32,9–14.

Not in such imbecile complacency, mourns Isaiah, was Judah meant to live. Later on, probably on the occasion of the rebellion against Sennacherib, he would say to a Jerusalem busily congratulating itself on the strength of its arsenal, its walls and strong places, its carefully laid-up water supply: "You have been unmindful of him who does these things, him who is their fashioner you have not seen!" (22,11b). The God who had guided Israel and Judah had not spent on them all his cares that they should live as Gentiles and a law to themselves. He had intended his blessings to call forth reciprocal goods; and here he had been disappointed and defrauded. This is the lesson of the famous and beautiful parable of Israel the Lord's vineyard in 5,1–7, in which the deeds of love tendered the

vine by Yahweh, the prophet's "beloved," ought to have produced rightdoing (*mishpat*) and righteousness (*sedaqah*), but instead have been repaid with *mispah* ("bloodshed") and *se'aqah* (an "outcry" against social oppression).

Woe to those who add house to house,
who join field to field,
until there is no more place,
but you alone are left dwellers in the land.
In my hearing Yahweh Sebaoth has sworn:
"Surely, many houses shall become desolation;
great and beautiful, they shall be without dwellers.
For ten yoke of vineyard shall produce but a single *bath*,
and a *homer* of seed shall produce but one *ephah*" (5,8–10).

Along with Micah (2,1–5), Isaiah explicitly singles out for note the monopoly in land that had borne such evil fruit in Judah. Micah had seen its work in the countryside, and Isaiah condemns it no less in the city. That these are the first prophets to refer to latifundism in so many words may be an indication that only in their times had it become a characteristic of Palestinian society, having been resisted hithertofore by the Israelitic tradition of smallholding. Isaiah evidently does not have Micah's firsthand knowledge of the bitter lot of the poor that provoked his opposition to the system. However, his objection is based on the same convictions and is directed against the same evils.

The later author of Jb 24,1–12 would describe in all their piteous details the ends to which such a system could lead. Isaiah, seeing it at its beginning, objects that it results in there being "no more place" in the land save for the few who "are left dwellers," who alone, in other words, would have social and economic security as owners or as members of an owning family. The transition from smallholding to the great estates meant that a great number of the

less favored and well-to-do had been reduced to the status of slaves and hirelings, ready prey for a wealthy class that was disposed to be unprincipled.

Something of what lies in the background of Isaiah's mind when he distinguishes the dwellers in the land from those who are mere sojourners, can be seen in 22,16 in his words directed against Hezekiah's official Shebna or—as the Dead Sea Scrolls text more correctly spells his name—Shubna. Shubna was probably of low birth, probably a foreigner, and certainly a "pusher." When he had constructed a sepulchre for himself on a height near Jerusalem, he was asked by Isaiah: "*What* have you here, and *whom* have you here, that you should hew out a sepulchre for yourself?"—that is to say, by what right did he attempt such a thing where he owned no property and belonged to no property-owning family. Isaiah's words are not simply the rebuke of a *parvenu*, but they express in contemporary terms the difference between the "citizen" and the outsider (cf. Gn 23,4). In a society still very closely bound to the land, ownership and participation in the owning class were the social security of the many.

What the monopolists were doing, then, was the equivalent of disenfranchising their fellow Judahites. It need not have been so, but so it was. They had destroyed the old order to no purpose worthier than the service of their private greed, and they had neither the capability nor the thought of giving anything good in return. Therefore Isaiah regards both their wealth and their system as evil, and therefore he concludes his oracle in 5,9 f. with the confident prediction that their gain shall not prevail in the sight of a just God.

3. THE FAILURE OF THE KINGS

As was true with Micah, Isaiah's messianic ideas form a piece with his other prophetic thinking, and they can be understood rightly only in the historical context of this thought.

Isaiah has reserved some of his harshest invective for the rulers of Judah, who not only have stood by and permitted Judah's rebellion against Yahweh's law, but have actively supported and encouraged this apostasy by the lead they have taken in it. In an oracle from an undetermined period in the prophet's career,[1] the fact is briefly stated (the address is made to Judah, and to Jerusalem in particular):

> Your rulers are apostates, companions of thieves;
> everyone loves bribes and pursues rewards.
> The orphan they do not judge rightly,
> and the widow's case comes not before them (1,23).

It is put in much greater detail in an oracle which we have no trouble in ascribing to Jotham's latter or Ahaz' earlier days:

> My people have been oppressed by a suckling,
> and women have lorded it over them.
> O my people, your guides betray you,
> they have effaced your proper paths.
> Yahweh has come to state his case,
> he stands to judge his people.
> Yahweh comes in judgment,
> with the elders and princes of his people:
> "You! You have devoured the vineyard;
> the loot of the needy is in your houses!

[1] As pointed out in the textual note beginning this chapter, Isaiah's first chapter was originally independent of the cc. 2–5 that collect his early prophecies. This chapter is extremely difficult to date, in view of the ambiguity of the evidence. For some, vv. 6–9 clearly point to the time after Sennacherib, and vv. 11–15 refer to the formalism that followed Hezekiah's reform; but the allusion to idolatry in v. 29 suggests to others Ahaz, and they consequently take vv. 6–9 as a reference to the devastation of the Syro-Ephraimite war.

How is it that you crush my people,
and grind the face of the needy?"
Oracle of the Lord Yahweh Sebaoth (3,12–15).

As we have already seen, the apostasy of the leaders consists in their alliance with the thieves at work despoiling the helpless. Rather than acquit themselves of their duty to protect the classic wards of society who need the sureties which only the guardians of public conscience can guarantee, they have sold themselves to permit the perversion of justice at its source. A common pattern of Near Eastern thought regarding kingship represented the king as "father of the widow and the orphan." In this conception of the kingly ideal the best Gentile and the best Israelite aspirations were in agreement. Thus were Judah's rulers apostates, because they had abdicated the most sacred responsibility of kingship.

But the inept, intrigue-ridden royal officialdom was far worse than this. Isaiah speaks of false guides, of men who lead astray, who are not merely content to be led astray for a consideration. The "suckling" to whom he refers was doubtless Ahaz, who according to 2 Kgs 16,2 was twenty years old when he began to reign, but who was presumably titular regent during Jotham's last years. The false guidance of Judah's lords was probably epitomized for Isaiah in the rival political factions which dominated the court and impelled Judah toward allignment with one or the other of the great Near Eastern powers. The playing of power politics does not come cheap, and there is no doubt that this was a contributing cause to the misery of the poor and helpless. Isaiah sees the vineyard Israel plundered and stripped clean by its guardians, its people crushed between upper and nether millstones. Taxes exacted from those unable to pay them accounted for part of the "loot" with which the princes could carry on their rivalries, which had brought Jerusalem to social and economic near-ruin (cf. 3,1–9). With the needy class becoming ever needier, further encouragement was given to the tendency toward the monopoly of the means of wealth. The results

of this, Isaiah was now seeing in Jerusalem. The process was not unlike the one Charles M. Doughty observed, many centuries later in our own times, at work in the agricultural communities of Arabia:

> Such are the most small landed men in this country . . . they and their portions of the dust of this world are devoured (hardly less than in Egypt and Syria) by rich money-lenders: that is by the long rising over their heads of an insoluble usury. . . . The rate is fifteen to the hundred for twelve months, paid in money; but if yielded in kind,—the payment of the poor man! for every real they are to receive a real and a half's worth, in dates or corn, at the harvest rates. This fruit they lay up till they may sell it, later in the year, at an enhanced price. . . . The villagers are undone thereby; and the most Beduins fall every year behindhand, thus losing a third in the use of their little money. . . . The soil is fallen thus into servitude: and when the mostly honest (Moslem) husbandmen-landowners, have at last mortgaged all for their debts; and are become tenants at will to those extortioners [of that which with a religious voice, contemning the unstable condition of this world, they call "the dust"—which was theirs], they begin to forsake the villages.[2]

That such things had been allowed to happen among Israelites could only be due to the apostasy of Judah's leaders. By omission and commission they had brought about this state, refusing to vindicate the cause of the widow and orphan and grinding the face of the needy.

It is in this context that we must understand Isaiah's notion of the messianic times and the coming of an ideal king. Down to the very end of his career we can see that his ideas in this respect remained

[2] *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (London: Jonathan Cape, [3]1921), vol. II, pp. 355, 387.

entirely consistent—just as consistent as the ineptness of Judahite leadership!—when he dwells on the wry contrast between the present regime—Hezekiah's, though the king himself is not condemned—and that of this ideal king of the future whose reign will be in righteousness and whose princes will rule according to right. Then, says Isaiah,

> no longer will the fool be called Excellency,
> nor will the deceiver be termed Honorable (32,5).

The "fool," there can be no doubt, is the Judahite ruler of Isaiah's day.

> For the fool voices folly,
> and his heart devises iniquity,
> to commit crime,
> and to speak sedition against Yahweh;
> to leave unsatisfied the craving of the hungry,
> and to remove drink from the thirsty.
> While the deceiver's deceits are evil:
> devious are the things he plots,
> to destroy the humble with lying utterances,
> the poor in pleading for their rights (32,6 f.).

The "deceivers," called "honorable" by themselves or by a common opinion historically prone to take the rich man on his own terms, are the cynical exploiters of the poor who have turned the larcenous incompetence of the government of Judah to their own evil ends. A man like Isaiah, who firmly believed the ancient revelation that God had appointed the Davidic monarchy for the salvation of his people, could only view this total betrayal with the most indescribable horror.

And thus we are brought to the specifically messianic thought of

Isaiah, expressed in the prophecies connected with the Syro-Ephraimite war, the circumstances of which we saw in our last chapter. In these prophecies Isaiah comes face to face with a Davidic king who uniquely embodied everything that was wrong with the royal institution in Judah, and who, therefore, became the unwilling occasion of some of the most fundamental messianic oracles of the Old Testament.

In c. 7 Isaiah is suddenly introduced as the confidant of King Ahaz, at least as one who was able to have ready access to the king. This position the prophet apparently continued to enjoy throughout Ahaz' reign, as he certainly did throughout the reign of his successor Hezekiah. No explanation or background is given this fact in the Bible, and therefore, as might be expected, various theories have developed to account for it. But probably no complicated explanation is required. The young king was without doubt surrounded by advisers of every kind, though it is beyond question that the pro-Assyrian political bloc did most of his thinking. Isaiah was already recognized as a prophet, and this fact afforded him freedom of expression, as it had in Amos' time, no matter how distasteful his message might be to those in power. The king of Israel of 1 Kgs 22 listened only reluctantly to Micaiah ben Imlah, but he did, after all, listen to him. (He also imprisoned Micaiah, it is true, but it could be argued that in so doing he was testing the prophet's words according to the law of Dt 18,21 f.) The text of Jer 26,18 f. shows that in the time of Micah and Isaiah the prophet's office was still respected, however little his words might be heeded. It is very likely, then, that Isaiah was merely one of many prophets who had free entry to the royal court. Certainly there were other prophets to whom Ahaz listened with much more alacrity—witness Isaiah's frequent denunciation of the priests and false prophets who had united to frustrate Yahweh's will.

Under whatever circumstances, at the beginning of the Syro-Ephraimite invasion Isaiah was inspired by the Lord to meet Ahaz "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool" outside Jerusalem, where the king was probably inspecting the water resources of the

city in view of the impending attack.[3] Along with Isaiah was his son, who bore the strangely prophetic name Shear-yashub, that is, "a remnant shall return." Everything about this meeting, not only Isaiah's words, was prophetic. The name Shear-yashub testified not only to the prophet's faith in Yahweh's promises to preserve Israel, even more it insisted on his belief in the necessary condition: only the Israel of faith was to be saved.

And faith is what Isaiah demanded of the young king. An end to the threat of Damascus and Samaria was promised within the year, but if this was to be, then Ahaz must put his faith in Yahweh (cf. 7,9), not in foreign arms, and not in his own sufficiency.

Faith in Yahweh was a commodity in which Ahaz was singularly lacking, as the prophet well knew. Not yet had he passed the point of no return recorded in 2 Kgs 16, when he committed his kingdom to Gentile religion and culture, but he was doubtless already well on the way. Therefore—and probably somewhat later—Isaiah was commissioned to offer Ahaz a sign for his faith, "whether from the depths of Sheol or the heights of heaven" (v. 11). To this Ahaz answered, with pretended piety, that he would not tempt Yahweh by asking for a sign. Exasperated, the prophet hurled at his head the prophecy of a sign that would remain an everlasting hope when Ahaz and his cynicism had been utterly destroyed:

> Hear, then, O house of David! Is it so little for you to weary men that you must also weary my God? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; Behold, the young woman is with child: she shall bring forth a son, and call his name Immanuel. Curds and honey he shall be eating when he learns

[3] Ahaz sacrificed his first-born son (2 Kgs 16,3), possibly on the occasion of the Syro-Ephraimite invasion. The place of human sacrifice was Topheth in the valley of Hinnom (2 Kgs 23,10), where "the upper pool" may have been situated. It has been suggested that Isaiah could have met Ahaz when he was actually returning from this gruesome rite, a circumstance that would lend special poignancy to the Immanuel prophecy. However, this view is too conjectural, and v. 10 ff. ("*again* Yahweh spoke to Ahaz") seem to have taken place on a different occasion than that of vv. 1–9.

how to refuse evil and choose good. For before the boy learns how to refuse evil and choose good, the land of those two kings of whom you are in dread will be deserted. Yahweh will bring upon you and your people and your father's house days such as have not been since the day Ephraim separated from Judah (vv. 13–17).

Later, some scribe glossed the reference to the days coming to Judah with the explanation: "Namely, the king of Assyria." And this seems to have been Isaiah's meaning.

What Isaiah told Ahaz was that, despite his insolence, Yahweh would afford him a sign that his prophet spoke the truth. Before the child now conceived would reach the age of discretion, Aram and Ephraim would be devastated. The Davidic dynasty would be saved, against the attempt of Damascus and Samaria to substitute on the throne "the son of Tabeel" (v. 6). But in turn, in revenge for Ahaz' and his people's sins, destruction and woe would also fall upon Judah and the royal house—for Sennacherib was to come!

One of the debated elements in this most debated text is the meaning of the "curds and honey" which Immanuel is to eat. These foods to an Israelite ordinarily evoked the good life, for they were foods of luxury. Here, however, some believe that the very opposite is meant: so few will be the people remaining in the devastated land, there will be more than enough curds and honey to go round (v. 22). On the other hand, while vv. 18–25 certainly continue the thought of v. 17, describing more fully the total destruction that is to strike Judah when it becomes the battleground of Assyria and Egypt, these verses may form a separate prophecy of their own rather than part of this one. In any case, Isaiah prophesies a mixture of good and evil: the precious dynasty is to survive, its enemies of the moment brought to naught, but punishment will inevitably come even to Judah.

I do not think there is any question that the Immanuel, "God with us," of Isaiah's prophecy is the ideal king to come, in whose reign

God will be truly with his people once more. I am also inclined to agree with the translators of the Jerusalem Bible and other modern Catholic interpreters that Isaiah had in mind as this coming king Hezekiah, Ahaz' son. The context of his prophecy seems to demand that the king in question should be born quite soon, to serve as a sign for Ahaz, or rather, as the condition under which the sign was to be worked out. Hezekiah did, as a matter of fact, partly fulfil the Davidic ideal. But actually, whether or not Isaiah was thinking of Hezekiah, his perspective is rather of what the king should be—the antithesis of what the kings had been—than of any specific bearer of the royal title. It was allowable for him at least to hope that Hezekiah would embody in himself all that Yahweh had promised as the issue of the Davidic kingship, but it was the promise itself with which he was most concerned.

The translators of the Greek Septuagint are responsible for the text that Mt 1,23 saw fulfilled in the birth of Christ: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child. . . ." When the Septuagint version was made, centuries after Isaiah and Hezekiah, the prophecy of a coming great king was still recognized to be valid, and its potentialities were known not to have been exhausted in Hezekiah. Neither Isaiah's nor the Septuagint's imagination could have conceived how wonderful the fulfilment of the prophecy would actually be, but the Septuagint testified to a continued faith in its wonderful nature by translating as it did. And Matthew rightly saw that in our Lord's birth it had been fulfilled.

Isaiah himself knew in some fashion that the birth of the messianic king would be wonderful. "The young woman" has always struck the reader as a somewhat unusual way to designate the mother of the coming king. The word (*almah*) does not necessarily mean a virgin, but it was able to be translated as the Septuagint did. Modern scholars have come to the conclusion (in view of some newly discovered Near Eastern parallels) that there may have been a ritual background to it, as a title applied to the queen mother in the religious ceremonial that surrounded the Davidic dynasty. It is perhaps significant that in the Book of Kings the queen mother is

always mentioned by name in the annals of the kings of Judah, never in those of the kings of Israel. Whatever be the explanation, Isaiah clearly looked for a messianic king, and the fact that he did not find him in his generation did not in any way lessen the value of his prophecy.

The passages following Isaiah's seventh chapter are likewise preoccupied with his confident prediction of the failure of the Syro-Ephraimite league and with his expectation of the ideal king. In 8,1–4 the prophet is inspired to inscribe on a cylinder seal—an object characteristic of the Mesopotamian civilization now dominated by Assyria—the name of his second son, surely one of the strangest ever inflicted on a child: Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Again this is a prophetic name: "prompt prey, swift booty." Despite Ahaz' lack of faith, Yahweh was to save his imperilled dynasty; yet not for Ahaz' sake, but for the sake of the divine promises. Assyria would be his instrument.

At the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth chapters we are confronted with a partial fulfilment of Isaiah's earlier prophecy. The Syro-Ephraimite league has been crushed; the Assyrian has come (at Ahaz' invitation), and Galilee and Transjordan of the northern kingdom have been overrun. For these erstwhile enemies of Judah there is also messianic hope, for there is nothing narrowly nationalistic about Isaiah's thinking. The prophecy opens with the words of consolation to Galilee which Mt 4,15 f. properly applies to the opening of our Lord's Galilean proclamation of the kingdom of God.

The motive and justification of this prediction of consolation are to be found in a new and marvelous event:

> For a child is born to us,
> a son has been given to us,
> and the government is upon his shoulder.
> His name shall be: Wonder-Counsellor, God-Hero,
> Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Great shall be his government, peace without end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and uphold it
in right and righteousness,
both now and forever.
The zeal of Yahweh Sebaoth will do this (9,5 f.).

Again it seems to me inescapable that Isaiah speaks of the ideal king, of the Immanuel of 7,14. The occasion appears to have been the birth of Hezekiah: these verses proclaim a royal birth that has recently taken place. But a specific historical king has only occasioned the language of the oracle; he is not its cause. The cause, rather, is what the king ideally signified as David's descendant, and as Yahweh's instrument in promoting righteousness and right. In God's providence, it was conceivable that Hezekiah could have been the fulfilment of this ideal. God's providence decreed otherwise, and Isaiah's proclamation found its ultimate fulfilment in Christ. The prophet was looking for a messianic king who would reverse the injustice and corruption of the kings of the past. He was looking, above all, for a king who would be God's instrument in working out his will for his kingdom. Never did a prophecy have a more satisfying fulfilment than did Isaiah's in Jesus.

As in Mi 5,1–3, while it is very evident in the above passage that Isaiah is referring to a Davidic king, he sedulously avoids the word "king." Instead, he calls him Counsellor, Hero (or Warrior), Father, and Prince. All these titles of dignity are found, at one place or another, associated by the Old Testament with the royal office; but always they signify something less than a king. At the same time, to each of these terms Isaiah has joined another which has normally a divine association: Wonder, God, Everlasting, Peace. Here we seem to have another instance of the prophetic spiritualization of the messianic idea. More and more, the messianic ruler is dissociated from the historical connotations of Israelitic kingship, while at the same time it is emphasized that the power and au-

thority he exercises will be Yahweh's. In the time of his rule, Yahweh himself will be Israel's king.

One final text should be seen in connection with Isaiah's messianic thought, which is also of one piece with the rest of his teaching. A preface to it can be found at the beginning of c. 10:

> Woe to those who decree decrees of iniquity,
> the scribes who inscribe misery,
> turning the lowly away from justice,
> plundering the needy of my people of their rights,
> making widows their booty,
> despoiling orphans (10,1 f.).

These words form Isaiah's judgment on the regime of Ahaz. The royal laws and judgments that ruled Judah were the cause of the destruction which Yahweh was to visit on his people (v. 3 f.). This they were because they were in defiance of the covenant law in which Yahweh had constituted Israel. Ahaz and his ministers were the exact antithesis of what was expected of a Yahwistic king.

Thus the relevance of these wonderful lines:

> There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
> and a sprout shall spring from his roots.
> And on him shall rest the spirit of Yahweh:
> a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
> a spirit of counsel and of might,
> a spirit of knowledge and of fear of Yahweh,
> and his delight shall be in the fear of Yahweh.
> He shall judge not by what appears to the eyes,
> he shall decide not by what is heard by the ears;
> but with righteousness he will judge the lowly,
> and decide with equity for the humble of the earth.
> He shall strike the powerful with the rod of his mouth,
> and slay the wicked with the breath of his lips.

Righteousness shall be a belt about his waist,
and fidelity a belt about his loins (11,1–5).

It is held by some that these verses are an addition from later times, after the Davidic dynasty had to all appearances become extinct in the Babylonian captivity, and when hope was now fired again for its revival under a new scion of David following the Jewish restoration in Palestine.[4] But while the passage is conceivable in such a setting—and v. 10 ff. which build on the prophecy doubtless do belong to this later period—it does not demand such a setting. The prophecy is entirely in keeping with Isaiah's thinking, provided we ascribe it to a stage in his thinking that is somewhat later than that of the preceding passages. Evidently he does now consider the existing Davidic dynasty to be defunct, morally if not physically, so that a new line must come forth from Jesse (David's father) to satisfy the divine promises. If we conclude that Isaiah's disillusionment with the kings of Judah now also embraced the Hezekiah in whom he had once hoped—and there is good intrinsic likelihood for such a supposition—we have a natural setting for the prophecy. Isaiah now looks not for a speedy fulfilment of Yahweh's covenant with David, but for a fulfilment reserved to an even indefinitely remote time. Accordingly, we can understand the exalted, mystical note on which he concludes the prophecy in vv. 6–9, where he sees the return of a universal paradisaical peace.

It is important to note that nothing essential has been changed in Isaiah's messianism. He continues to look for a Messiah, an "anointed one" of Yahweh, who will be filled with the virtues most desired in a king, who will be Yahweh's agent in rectifying the evils of the past. He is less ready to hope that this reign of

[4] Such was the case in the time of Zerubbabel (Ezr 5), grandson of the last Judahite king, who was looked to by the postexilic prophets Haggai (cf. 2,23) and Zechariah (cf. 6,12 ff.) as the one who would restore the Davidic kingship.

peace and justice will come soon, but he is convinced that it is coming.

This prophecy of c. 11 is closely related to that of 32,1–8, part of which we saw above, which also looks to the messianic king as one who will right wrongs in Yahweh's name. With the coming of his happy reign:

> The humble shall once more have joy in Yahweh,
> and the poor of mankind shall exult in the Holy of Israel;
> for the tyrant will disappear,
> and the mocker will vanish;
> all who are eager for iniquity will be destroyed:
> they who condemn a man with a word,
> who lay snares in the gate for him who reproves,
> and turn aside the just with an empty plea (29,19–21).

All these final prophecies probably derive from the end of Isaiah's career, in the time of Sennacherib. The "tyrant" is for Isaiah the pride-swollen enemy of Yahweh (cf. 13,11; 29,5), identical with the "mocker," the worldly-wise, apostate leader of the people (28,14.22). Understanding the function he was to serve in replacing such men, we should realize that the messianic king was conceived by Isaiah in truly "spiritual" terms. He would not be just a secular ruler—no true Judahite king could be merely that —but, above all, the one anointed and set apart by the Lord to do the Lord's work. To rule in Yahweh's name, over Yahweh's kingdom, to destroy Yahweh's enemies: these were to be his works.

It is true that Isaiah stands only midway in the development of Israel's messianic revelation. It would take the catharsis of the exile, it would take several centuries more of prophecy and pondering, before the vision of a supranational king of an Israel not of the flesh could be grasped by men in all its fulness. That vision, nevertheless, would never have come—saving God's providence —without Isaiah. The line is long, but direct, from the Judah of

the eighth century to the hillside in Galilee where it was proclaimed: "Blessed are you poor . . . for yours is the kingdom of God" (Lk 6,20).

4. THE SEEDS OF EVIL

More profoundly than Micah, and in much greater detail, Isaiah lays in relief the causes of the evils that both he and Micah have recorded in their contemporary Judah. In this regard, probably what is most obtrusive in Isaiah's thinking, in keeping with his familiarity with the governing classes in Jerusalem, is the pernicious influence of foreign alliances, whether with Assyria, as was the case during Ahaz' time, or the movement for entente with Egypt, which finally won out in Hezekiah's.

Isaiah's prophetic attitude, we should know very well, was not the narrow-minded xenophobia of the ignorant. We saw how far Amos was from this sort of thing, how, as a matter of fact, he capitalized on its existence in others to a quite opposite purpose, in his initial oracle attacking Israel. In the prophecies of Isaiah we encounter for the first time an extensive collection of oracles against foreign nations. Some of these, if isolated, might be taken as the work of a purely nationalistic prophet of the type Isaiah opposed, but this they cannot be when they are seen in conjunction with his other prophecies. The hand that gathered them together as a distinct collection was not Isaiah's; in his own career they were uttered along with his words against his own people. The foreigners were the object of prophecy because they, too, were Yahweh's enemies, sharing in that overweening pride that had caused Judahites to rise up against their God.

Foreign alliances were wrong not because foreigners were necessarily a scurvy lot. Rather, such alliances implied repudiation of Israel's alliance with Yahweh, the covenant which gave meaning to Israel's existence. They were wrong because they subverted the theocratic society of which Yahweh was head and author, substituting an alien partner from whom protection was sought

and to whom loyalty and fealty were due instead of to Yahweh's law. When political treaty replaced the covenant as public policy, covenant law retained only a private, and generally ineffective, sanction. Israel's alliance with Assyria, according to Hos 12,2, had caused it to forsake Yahweh's true covenant and to pursue "lying and oppression." In the same vein, Zephaniah (1,8 f.) will condemn the princes of Judah who in "foreign attire" have perpetrated "violence and fraud." Isaiah is part of this prophetic opposition.

In a series of poems which have as their background the negotiation of an alliance with Egypt against Assyria, Isaiah calls down woe on those who descend into Egypt. They are trusting in a false security, putting their faith in man rather than in God, seeking what is impossible for a people truly united with Yahweh (cf. also 30,1–5.6 f.; 31,1–3):

Therefore, hear the word of Yahweh, mocking men,
who rule over this people in Jerusalem.
For you say, "We have enacted a covenant with Death,
and with Sheol we have made a pact.
When the roaring flail passes over,
it will not reach us;
for we have set up falsehood as our refuge,
and in deceit are we sheltered."
Therefore, thus says the Lord Yahweh:
"Behold, I am setting up a stone in Zion,
a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, firmly fixed;
who has faith in it will not be moved.
And I shall make right its measure,
and righteousness its plumb line.
But hail shall ravage your refuge of falsehood,
and waters shall engulf your shelter.
Your covenant with Death shall be covered over,
and your pact with Sheol shall not stand" (28,14–18).

The alliance with Egypt is a covenant with Death and the Underworld, a structure built on false and deceitful premises that can only bring destruction. Opposed to this is the structure which Yahweh himself proposes, of which he is the cornerstone and right and righteousness the norm and measure. This means, of course, that faith in Yahweh brings true salvation in contrast to the chimerical safety of political alliance. But also, as a complement to this faith, the kind of life that is proper to the order willed by Yahweh is set in contrast to the double-dealing of Judah's rulers, whose masterwork was this Egyptian delusion.

Isaiah calls these rulers "mocking men." This is the same term with which in 29,19–21 he characterized the wealthy and powerful of the land who were responsible for Judah's social ills, and who must disappear in the day of Yahweh's restoration. They are likewise the "fools" allied with the "deceivers" who entangle the humble in the meshes of that falsehood which is the quality of their pact with Sheol (cf. 32,6 f.). There seems to be no doubt that by the "right and righteousness" that measure Yahweh's order of things, Isaiah understands pre-eminently the social virtues of the man of faith, which contradict all that Judah's false leaders have stood for.

Judah's external politicking was at the root of its social and moral disorders because it had substituted for faith in Yahweh's promises a too human prudence and a reliance on self, for the quickening spirit of God the Death and Sheol that are the natural end of all that is flesh. As it had betrayed the kingship of Yahweh, it could not fail to destroy, by removing their source and principle, Israel's soul and moral fibre.

Thus Isaiah reasoned. Was it all a hopeless idealism? We may be tempted to think so, we who have been conditioned by several centuries of private and departmentalized religion, who are all citizens of an omnicompetent state to which we look for our primary identity in this world, though we might want it otherwise. A tiny country like Judah, we might say, was nothing if not the protégé of one of the great powers, and if it had to share in the

defeats as well as the successes of its protecting power, well, such are the fortunes of war and politics. As, we hope, reasonable and realistic men, we are apt to look on Isaiah's wholesale denunciation of foreign entanglements with the same exasperated unease with which we reject the attitude of Christian pacifism today. A fine ideal, but unworkable in the face of brutal fact.

But we must not apply to Judah, and to Isaiah's criticism of it, standards by which they were never meant to be judged. The pre-exilic Israelite community was not, and could not become, a secular state in the sense that the neighboring Near Eastern countries were secular states. The principle of union, the constitutive ethos, the very notion of citizenship and communal responsibility, all were different, or were intended to be. For this reason the cry for a monarch was condemned in 1 Sm 8,7 ff., a passage that is a perfect synthesis of the prophetic attitude. Israel had become a state and had adopted its trappings through sheer necessity and the will to survive, but this had not touched its essential nature any more than the governmental forms acquired by the Church from Roman law have transformed it into a secular body. Israel was still a covenant community whose bond of union was religious rather than political, or it was nothing. The prophetic struggle was against the secularization of a religious organism. Though the parallel is not exact, the prophets were fighting a battle similar to that waged by some of the Saints against secularizing tendencies in the medieval and Renaissance Church.

It is well to remember that the prophecies we have been reading were spoken during the reign of Hezekiah, whom the author of Kings praised as a king after Yahweh's heart. It is obvious, I think, that Isaiah would qualify that praise. If Hezekiah fulfilled the Yahwistic ideal in some part, in other ways he fell far short of it. Under his regime the process of secularization went on unchecked, and the king himself was not wholly immune to its steady attrition. It is not at all difficult to imagine Isaiah passing from enthusiastic hope in Hezekiah to complete disillusion, ending with the conviction that Yahweh's ideal would be fulfilled only in an

unknown future. The historical supplement in Is 36–39, which has been borrowed mostly from the Book of Kings, stands as a kind of apologia of the Isaian "party" against Hezekiah. It shows the king responsive to the prophetic word, but already seduced into alliance with Egypt, which would prove no staff of strength but rather "a broken reed that pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it" (36,6). And this was only the culmination of a long policy of temporizing on Hezekiah's part.[5] Despite all the good that he did—and, like most of us, he was a mixture of good and bad—and despite all the favors shown him by Yahweh, Hezekiah had neither the courage nor the consistency to be Isaiah's ideal king. His valedictory as it appears in the Book of Isaiah has a peculiar poignancy for our own generation, perhaps, in view of the way that history has of repeating itself. "There will be," said he, "peace and security in my days." This is not the sentiment of an evil man, but neither is it the sentiment of a hero. It is very much the sentiment of a man with no ambition to benefit any generation beyond his own. It could not have been the sentiment of a Messiah.

Akin to this was the rugged individualism responsible for monopolism and the corruption of the courts that preferred the private to the public welfare. It was manifest in the avarice (cf. 1,23), the pride in wealth (cf. 2,7–17; 3,16–24), and the dissipations of the idle rich. These, no less than Hezekiah's words, are signs of a society that lived for the main chance, for itself alone.

This spirit accounted not merely for the fact that Israel's ancient institutions were abandoned, but that nothing adequate was devised to take their place. Admittedly, customs originating in a world that had not anticipated the later problems could not always be preserved in detail. What was needed was adjustment, to adapt to changed conditions in the spirit of the old order in which Israel had been constituted. This would have involved action on

[5] As noted, these chapters have been taken from 2 Kgs 18–20. Scholars are agreed that the historical order of events would require c. 20 to precede cc. 18–19. It is possible that the sequence was reversed by an editor struck by the tone of the beginning of c. 20, which appears to put Hezekiah on his deathbed.

the part of the leaders to provide for the social well-being of the weak and to restrain the rapacity of the strong. It would have demanded of all a certain measure of self-sacrifice, in recognition that there is a better good that must take precedence over what we know very well are often quite tawdry private inclinations, hallow them though we will.

The leadership for which Isaiah had such bitter reproach could not be excused, though it could be partly explained, by its own natural inadequacies (cf. 3,1–15; 10,1–4; 22,15–18.19–23). It rose in an age that had seen brother set against brother, to the consequent uncertainty of civil order (cf. 9,17–20). Those fitted to rule had been prevented from doing so or had shirked their responsibilities, and those unfitted had been set in their place. The transgressions of the people, therefore, were as much the product of ineptitude and fecklessness from on high as they were of malicious inducement and bad example. But in all of this, there was no final excuse for Judah the nation: if the people were misled, it was willingly, and if they were blind, it was because they wished it so (cf. 9,12–16; 30,8–18).

In plain fact, Judah like Israel before it had abandoned its ideals and had failed to keep pace morally and spiritually with its economic and political development. If this is a tragedy for any people, it was doubly so for one whose claim to eminence could never lie in material greatness among the nations of the Near East, whose pretensions to warlike might could be greeted with such amused contempt by the Assyrian *rabshakeh* (Is 36,8 f. = 2 Kgs 18,23 f.), and who was nothing if not what Yahweh had destined it to be, a light to lighten the Gentiles.

5. JUSTICE AND HOLINESS

For Isaiah, there could be no explanation of Judah's crimes that was not a religious one. Its social crimes were only one aspect of its apostasy from Yahweh's law; they were one with its formalism (1,10–15; 28,13 f.), its idolatry and syncretism (1,29–31; 2,18–20;

17,9–11), its adoption of foreign superstitions (2,6), and the rest. Israel had rejected Yahweh its Father; there was the cause of all its crimes (1,2 f.).

More than we readily recognize of Isaiah's theology of sin and righteousness stems from the experience that gave him his prophetic call and formed the content of its message, which we find described in the sixth chapter of his book. Here are revealed both the cause and the burden of Isaiah's doctrine of the moral significance of Yahweh's holiness. As we have already seen so much of this message, it is not inappropriate that we have saved to the end the story of the divine encounter that gave it being.

> The year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and elevated throne. His garments were filling the temple. Seraphim stood above him, each with six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their legs, and with two they flew. Each cried to the other:
>
> "Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sebaoth,
> the whole earth is filled with his glory!"
>
> The foundations of the threshold were shaken by the sound of their cry, and the house filled with smoke.

It is very likely that this vision—of Yahweh enthroned above the Ark of the Covenant in the shadow of the Seraphim—occurred to the prophet as he stood in the temple of Jerusalem, surrounded by the smoke of sacrifice and the cries of the faithful. We have here the record of a profound spiritual experience, in which he penetrated the liturgical symbolism and came face to face with the realities of which liturgy is the surrogate.

His vision is of a Yahweh utterly transcendent, a Being whose face may not be seen by mortal man, in whose presence even the superhuman adoring beings must dissemble their very existence. Yet withal, he is a God most intimately associated with the earth, for the world and all that dwell therein are the testimony to his

creative power. Most importantly of all, he is the God of Israel—it is not an idle subtlety when we say that Isaiah's vision is less of God the Creator who is consequently Yahweh of Israel, than, first and foremost, of Yahweh the King of Israel who is Creator of the world. The vision is pre-eminently of the enthroned King of Israel. He is hailed Yahweh Sebaoth, the ancient name with which the Jerusalem liturgy saluted its God. Even at his most awesome he is King, one who rules and judges his people and who lays down laws, one who is the model of what kingship should be in Israel. Isaiah's first thought in his presence is of his sin and of the sin which he shares with the rest of Yahweh's people:

> I said: "Woe is me, for I am lost,
> for I am a man of unclean lips,
> and I dwell among a people of unclean lips,
> yet my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh Sebaoth!"

This is significant, for the vision is not of Yahweh's majesty only, but of his holiness. Its purpose is not merely to demonstrate the commonplace of man's nothingness in the presence of the divine. Isaiah thinks of his sin rather than of his created nothingness, and what he experiences is the relation that is possible between God and himself.

> Then one of the Seraphim flew to me, holding in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth with it, saying: "See, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is removed, your sin is forgiven."

Then Yahweh speaks. His first words are to define his relationship with Judah, the precise relationship which involves the prophet:

I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send? Who will go forth for us?" I answered: "Here am I! Send me!"

Conscious that God has forgiven his sin, Isaiah responds to the divine call with alacrity, in a way that invites comparison with the reluctance of the timid Jeremiah, and with the laconic acceptance of the matter-of-fact Amos. Yahweh the almighty, the one God, who alone is holy, has a claim on man and a most especial claim on Judah, and Isaiah is his prophet. The remainder of the vision is concerned with Yahweh's commission to Isaiah, the prophecy of doom with which we are now so familiar.

The relation of Yahweh to men, we can say again, is far more pronounced in this vision than is anything that separates him from man. What is really stressed, in fact, is not that God and creation are opposed, but God and sin. It is in this light that Isaiah consistently views sin, as the obstacle sundering God from his people, who are obliged to seek him where only he can be found, in holiness.

The magnificent poem of c. 33 may have been composed by Isaiah for the consolation of Judah in the difficult days of Sennacherib, or it may be a later work, proper to Deutero-Isaiah's Book of Consolation. If the latter is true, it is still a work very much in the spirit of the prophet Isaiah. In it the prophet speaks of a land where once more

> Yahweh is exalted, for he reigns on high;
> he fills Zion with right and righteousness (v. 5).

And in this day, with Yahweh again "our judge, our lawgiver, our king, our savior" (v. 22), when the sin of the people who dwell in the land has been forgiven (v. 24), and when all have recognized that the true and enduring wealth is wisdom, knowledge, and

the fear of Yahweh (v. 6), then will emerge the true subject of Yahweh, the recipient of his salvation:

> He who pursues righteous paths,
> who speaks honest words;
> who disdains profit gained by oppression,
> who shuts his palms not to take bribery,
> seals his ears not to hear bloody counsels,
> closes his eyes not to look on evil (v. 15).

This ideal citizen of Yahweh's kingdom eschews all the iniquities that left Judah a people "of unclean lips"; he lives in the right and righteousness gained of Yahweh: his holiness (cf. 2,11.17). The sinners of Zion, who cannot withstand the fire of the divine wrath (v. 14), are they who lack these virtues.

To much the same purpose, Isaiah speaks of Jerusalem in a metaphor that echoes Hosea's conception of the marital relation between Yahweh and Israel:

> How has she become an adulteress,
> the faithful city,
> she that was filled with right!
> Righteousness reposed within her,
> but now murderers (1,21).

Right and righteousness were once in Jerusalem, when she was a faithful spouse united to Yahweh. Now a city of infidelity and evil-doing, Zion's lot is the result of her apostasy that has removed her from Yahweh's holiness. The prophecy continues:

> "Wherefore—oracle of the Lord Yahweh Sebaoth,
> the Mighty of Israel—

Oh! I shall take vengeance on my foes,
I shall revenge myself upon my enemies.
I shall stretch forth my hand against you,
I shall burn away your impurities as with lye,
I shall remove all your dross.
I shall restore your judges as in olden times,
your magistrates as before.
Afterwards it will be said of you: City of righteousness,
faithful Citadel."
Zion shall be redeemed by right,
and her converted people by righteousness (1,24–27).

Retribution on the many is necessary that there may be a faithful remnant; from the wrath-to-be will come forth those restored through Yahweh's power to the righteousness to which he called Israel. Again, as so often, righteousness is expressed in social terms, since righteousness is the imitation of Yahweh's holiness, which had made itself known in his good deeds to Israel. There are those who understand "right" (which can be translated "judgment") and "righteousness" (or "justice") in the final two lines as Yahweh's vindictive justice, his condemnatory judgment that makes way for the remnant. Still others believe that the verse is the observation of a later pious reader rather than Isaiah's. However, it seems to me that the lines are an integral part of the text, and that the words in question continue to mean what they do through the rest of the passage, namely, the qualities of the remnant of Israel that are the measure of its redemption. Taken thus, added meaning is given to Zion's "converted people," whose righteousness (the work of Yahweh) is the restoration of Jerusalem. It is clear that social justice figures largely in Isaiah's mind as the result of the redemption to be worked through Yahweh's holiness, even as social injustice epitomized to him quite definitely Judah's present state of opposition to Yahweh's holiness. There is no holi-

ness for man, in other words, that does not involve his dealings with his neighbor.

That such a social sense is to be attached to these words, we have further reason in what we have already seen—the prophet's habitual association of the social virtues with the pursuit of true religion, the quest of holiness, and with the messianic restoration. In contrasting the truly moral nature of religion with the empty and idle sacrifices of sinful Judah, he says:

> Desist from evil, learn to do good;
> pursue right, help the oppressed;
> do justice to the orphan,
> plead the widow's case (1,16b–17).

And Isaiah's final word on the messianic king was of his exercise of righteousness, equity, and fidelity in righting social wrongs and vindicating the right (11,4 f.).

These qualities of the ideal king were in 11,2 attributed to the spirit—the communicated power—of Yahweh, as it was in Mi 3,8; and in 11,9 Isaiah exults that in the days to come there shall be no evil and no destruction because the land will be filled with the knowledge of Yahweh (recall Hos 4,1). The messianic king will "judge"—rightly rule—with righteousness; he will "decide" (the Hebrew word is the one we translated "reprove" in the text of Amos), vindicating him who, according to Am 5,10, was despised by the iniquitous of Israel; and these he will do with "equity" —the word is related to the term "upright" which Micah used as a synonym for Amos' "right." He will be clad in righteousness and fidelity; Hos 2,21 f. uses the same terms to describe the bridal gift bestowed on the renewed Israel by Yahweh. Identical qualities are predicated of the Immanuel by Isaiah in 9,6, and again of the ideal ruler in 32,1.

In yet a final text Isaiah calls up the messianic restoration in language reminiscent of Hos 4,1, where Israel's sinful state was sum-

marized in its lack of the knowledge of God, of fidelity (*emeth*), and of loyalty (*hesed*), the love for man that is anchored in the love for God. Isaiah says:

> The throne shall be established in *hesed*,
> and on it will sit in *emeth*, in the tent of David,
> a judge who pursues *mishpat* (right),
> and who hastens *sedeq* (righteousness) (16,5).

If once more we compare this passage with Hos 2,21 f. on the qualities of the renewed Israel, we see how intimately Isaiah connects the work of the messianic leader (note again, he is not called king) with the state of the messianic people of restoration.

In view of all this, it is easy to agree that for Isaiah "righteousness or justice is the virtue of a kingdom in which God transmits to his people something of his own holiness"; and in this teaching we can see "the first prophetic intimation of the New Testament notion of justification."[6] Using a vocabulary and conceptual framework shared with other prophets, but in his own distinctive way, in keeping with his searching treatment of every aspect of Judah's relation to its God, Isaiah has shown how essentially religious was Judah's social problem and how essentially social was its true religion. The restored remnant will be holy (4,3; 6,13) not simply as a people publicly inscribed to Yahweh, but as a people cleansed of all its present evils (4,4; 1,25). Just as righteousness with Yahweh is the manifestation of his holiness (5,16), the holiness that befits Yahweh's people will be shown forth in its practice of the social virtues. The lack of those virtues here and now is effective proof that this people is at odds with its God.

Isaiah can be said to correspond in a fashion to Micah in Judah as Hosea did to Amos in Israel, as the deeper thinker who has worked into a theology the more impassioned and circumstanced

[6] Paul Auvray and Jean Steinmann, *Isaïe* (La Sainte Bible de Jérusalem; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1951, ^{2}1957), note on Is 1,26.

attack on evil of his companion prophet. He not only reproduced the teaching of his predecessors, he rethought it in the light of his own unique experience of Yahweh; he has, perhaps best of all the prophets, integrated into a whole a sublime understanding of the nature of both God and man and of the relation of human conduct to human destiny.

Isaiah obviously shared the conviction of Israelite election that meant so much to both Amos and Hosea. This teaching is implicit in most of what we have heard him say, and especially in the inaugural vision of c. 6. Election he refers, as do Amos and Hosea and Micah, to Mosaic times (cf. 10,24.26). But it must be admitted that his emphasis is elsewhere, and that he pays relatively minor attention to that part of the Israelite past that was so important to earlier prophets. In a sense, David is more significant to him than Moses—the David of the dynastic oracle and covenant.

It is in regard to Israel's future rather than to its past that Isaiah makes his most unique contribution. Some critics have said that Isaiah showed his people a way back, in contrast to the complete negativism of Amos, Hosea, and Micah. It is not correct, as I believe we have seen, to call these other prophets negative—this is possible only if we arbitrarily decide that all the positive utterances attributed to them are spurious—but we must agree that, quantitatively at least, Isaiah's is the positive prophecy. What makes it so is mainly his insistence on the relation of human righteousness to the holiness of Yahweh that wills to fill the earth and that can triumph over the obduracy of a people. Amos told Israel that the day of Yahweh's triumph was to be dreaded rather than desired (5,18); and if there would be a spared remnant, it would be to underscore rather than to mitigate the terror of Yahweh's coming: "As the shepherd snatches from the lion's mouth two legs or a piece of an ear, so the Israelites who dwell in Samaria shall be saved, with the corner of a couch or a piece of a bed" (Am 3,12). Isaiah does not deny that the day of Yahweh will be a day of wrath for the unjust, but he also reveals that it will be the means of salvation of the righteous remnant:

For Yahweh will banish the populace,
and there will be great emptiness in the land.
There will remain in it but a tenth,
and this, again, shall be given to destruction.
Like the terebinth and like the oak,
whose stump alone remains from the felling,
its stump shall be a holy seed (6,12 f.).

These last verses, as many commentators strongly suspect, may have been added by Isaiah to his account of his inaugural vision, at the close rather than at the opening of his career. They have about them the air of one who is attempting to interpret the actions of God in the perspective of a completed prophetic ministry. But it is not necessary to think (as the CCD version apparently does) that the final line has been inserted by some later hand, for the whole passage is entirely Isaianic. The holy remnant, which for Amos was only a detail half-reluctantly admitted from tradition, is an essential assertion of Isaiah's teaching.

Right shall dwell in the desert,
and righteousness shall inhabit the fruitlands;
and the work of righteousness shall be peace,
and the labor of right shall be security for ever.
And my people shall inhabit a dwelling of peace,
and habitations of security,
and resting places of ease (32,16–18).

In this context, too, where Isaiah is contrasting the righteousness of the future restored kingdom with the social oppression of Judah's princes, we see again the necessary role played by social justice in the condition of the peace to come, when the relations of God and man will be once more ideal. Peace, and the right and righteousness that complement it, include harmony with man as

well as with God. Isaiah could well hold up to his people a consolation of this kind, which was also a motivation, after the war and tumult they had experienced in their state of alienation from Yahweh.

The viewpoint of all these passages is eschatological, of the messianic future. Nevertheless, they embody truths that are transcendent of the circumstance of time. The Immanuel who will restore and confirm the reign of right and righteousness without end, who will be called "prince of peace" and establish an everlasting peace (9,5 f.), the messianic king who will rule by the social virtues (11,4 f.; 16,5), is himself but a part, if a principal part, of the restored remnant. Isaiah himself, through the forgiveness of his sin of which he became aware in the inaugural vision, likewise became by anticipation a part of that restored remnant. The kingdom of the future grows from the stump that remains from the felling of the present kingdom. The just man of the present, who owes his justice to the grace and loving-kindness of God, is the nucleus of the coming kingdom of the just.

Here pre-eminently was the positive value of Isaiah's constant insistence on Judah's social wrongs as the consequence of its religious apostasy, on the inseparability of social justice and religion. They are as inseparable in the future as they are in the present. The promise of peace, the assurance of a glorious age of fulfilment for the righteous, were realistic motives for the return to social justice as to every other virtue that had been banished through human malice.

There is an assurance in Isaiah that is not quite matched by any other prophet, not even by the eminently hopeful Hosea. As a bolster to his hopes Isaiah had, as Hosea did not, the existing Judahite prerogatives, the stuff which the kingdom of the future would clothe with a new form. He had the divine covenant with the Davidic kingship, and he had the peculiar sanctity of the Jerusalem temple and its tradition. He could afford to look forward cheerfully to "that day," when

The Light of Israel will become a fire,
and its Holy shall be a flame,
that will burn and consume his thorns,
and his thistles in a single day.
The glory of his forests and his fruitlands
Yahweh will destroy, soul and body;
the remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few
that a child may write them down (10,17–19).

For, despite the thoroughness with which Yahweh will vindicate the honor of his name:

In that same day the remnant of Israel,
the survivors of the house of Jacob,
will lean no more on him who smote them,
but will lean on Yahweh, the Holy of Israel, in truth.
A remnant shall return!
a remnant of Jacob to El Gibbor (v. 20 f.).

Shear yashub: a remnant shall return. Isaiah testified to his faith in the name he gave his son, even in the dark days of Ahaz. In the days to come, no more will God's people be seduced, as they had been seduced so disastrously first by Assyria and then by Egypt. They will be faithful to Yahweh alone, and to his holiness.

It is true, Isaiah says that *only* a remnant shall return. The consolation he offers contains its own stern reminder that the Israel to whom he was sent would not survive Yahweh's testing. The Israel of the restoration, the Israel of faith, will be gathered from the survivors of a shipwrecked nation. *Shear yashub* is as much a warning as it is a solace.

But it does not cease to be a word of comfort because it contains a warning. Throughout, Isaiah's emphasis remains positive. The remnant, he says, shall return to El Gibbor. This can be translated,

as it frequently is, "God the Mighty"—*gibbor*, literally "hero" or "warrior," was an epithet often applied to Yahweh in Israelite antiquity. But El Gibbor ("God-Hero") is likewise the title that Isaiah gives to the messianic king in 9,5, and here his meaning is very likely the same. However small the remnant, it will be a holy people, possessed of all the glorious attributes with which he endowed the Immanuel and his kingdom.

Sennacherib was the result of the scheming of the practical politicians of Judah. Isaiah's counsel went unheeded, that a return to the righteousness willed by Yahweh was the seed of salvation. That peace is the fruit of righteousness and not of arms is as hard a saying today as it was in Isaiah's time. There is, nevertheless, every reason to believe that it is a true saying, however long we must wait for it to be taken in, by politicians or by anyone else, saving always the Saints.

PART THREE

The Prophets of the Seventh Century

THREE MINOR PROPHETS
JEREMIAH BEN HILKIAH

CHAPTER EIGHT

Three Minor Prophets

1. JUDAH FROM MANASSEH TO JOSIAH

After Hezekiah's death, Manasseh (687–642 B.C.) set out methodically to undo his father's lifework, reverting to and even surpassing the Assyrianizing with which Ahaz had afflicted Judah, and taking a lead in the most dismal of Gentile practices. Though the biblical historians characteristically describe Manasseh's subversion of the Hezekian reform almost exclusively in terms of the ritual of the Jerusalem temple, we know enough of the relation of this to the moral life of Judah to understand that their description of Manasseh's reign as a return to the ways of Ahaz means that all the aspects of the people's religious life were affected. There was opposition to Manasseh, to be sure, from "Yahweh's servants, the prophets" (2Kgs 21,10 ff.), as well as from others with whose "innocent blood" the king bathed Jerusalem (2 Kgs 21,16). The work that Hezekiah had done did not go entirely for naught. Nevertheless, the thoroughness of Manasseh's reversal of his father's Yahwistic policies may be measured alike in the pagan name of his son Amon (642–640), and, better still, in Amon's character as it was manifested during his short reign.

We have seen that there is reason to think that after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, the king of Judah, whether officially or merely by default, governed the territory that had been

technically annexed to the Assyrian empire. Such a supposition would give background to the Chronicler's account of how Hezekiah sent messengers throughout the north to invite the Israelites to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (2 Ch 30), and would explain Josiah's later actions at Bethel and the other cities of Samaria (2 Kgs 23,15–20; 2 Ch 34,6 f.). It might also give the reason—though there are other explanations for this—why the biblical writers, after this time, begin to call Judah "Israel."

If Judah did, to some extent at least, inherit the northern economy, it could not fail to benefit tremendously from it, especially while it was ruled by such a faithful vassal of Assyria as Manasseh was. The structure of the now defunct northern kingdom had not been changed overnight by the Assyrian annexation; rather, there was a slow process of change (cf. Ezr 4,2) that had its immediate effects on the upper classes rather than the broad mass of the people. Unfortunately, our source material is not sufficient to allow us to reconstruct the relation of Judah to Israel during these times with anything like certainty. At all events, Judah remained a small island of semiautonomy in an Assyrian sea. The peace maintained by Sennacherib's successors Esarhaddon (681–668) and the terrible Ashurbanipal (668–625) would have helped make Judah's position under Manasseh's long reign enviable in respect to trade and commerce, even though it no longer had direct access to the Edomite port on the Red Sea.

There is meagre but conclusive evidence to prove that Judah did prosper materially under Manasseh. The archeology of Tell en-Nasbeh (Mizpah) shows that though this city was not under very much direct foreign influence during this period, it was nevertheless the centre of wide commercial connections. The same has been verified of the relatively minor town of Tell Beit Mirsim. Tell Beit Mirsim did, indeed, experience a decline after Sennacherib, but there was no serious decline until the final decades before the exile. The city gate of Tell en-Nasbeh, probably the most famous gate in Palestinian archeology for its illustration of the many biblical references to "the gate" as the place of judgment,

marketing, and assembly, probably dates from this time after Sennacherib.

With the voice of Yahwism practically silenced through these years, we can easily conclude that the traditional abuses of wealth and position must have continued without stint. That the law of Yahweh could languish in the Jerusalem temple, hidden and forgotten until Josiah's reform, is adequate enough commentary on what must have been the evils of Judah in the days of Manasseh and Amon.

After the picture of unrelieved wrongdoing presented by the Book of Kings, we are hardly prepared for the story of Manasseh's conversion told in 2 Ch 33,11 ff. Both Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal list Manasseh among their vassal kings, but nowhere in their fairly complete annals is there anything about his deportation. It seems odd, furthermore, that he should have been taken to Babylon, as the Chronicler claims, rather than to Nineveh. It is widely believed that the Chronicler has depended here on an unreliable tradition, which he was glad to use because it explained to his own satisfaction how Manasseh could have deserved such a long life. The fact that Manasseh fortified Jerusalem (2 Ch 33,14)—and this has been verified archeologically—could have given rise to the story that he had rebelled against Assyria. Afterwards, the account of his deportation could have been modelled after the history of Jehoiachin, who was indeed taken away to Babylon.

On the other hand, it is hard to see how a king like Manasseh, whose reputation for badness became altogether proverbial, could have been credited by anyone with conversion if there was absolutely nothing at all to the story. It might be easier to understand, in fact, why the author of Kings could have passed over the story that was seized on by the Chronicler. It is now known that in Ashurbanipal's time a brother of his named Shamashumukin, who was governor of Babylon, attempted a revolt, which was savagely crushed. While it lasted, the revolt had counted the allegiance of a number of Assyria's subject peoples. It is possible that Manasseh joined this revolt, and that he was deported to Babylon for a time

during its aftermath. Our information, again, is not sufficient to clarify the situation altogether. The Assyrian kings were quite selective in the materials that went into their regnal histories, and they were not in the habit of recording even their temporary defeats.

If indeed Manasseh did have a change of heart, it is evident that it came too late for him to do much about it. The biblical authors pay scant attention to his son Amon save to note that he continued all of Manasseh's evil ways. Amon's reign was short, and without doubt he remained the faithful ally of the Assyrians. It was probably from the rival factions surrounding the Assyrian alliance that the palace revolution broke out that claimed Amon's life.

The loyalty of the best elements of the people to the Davidic dynasty in which Isaiah had placed his hopes made possible the Josian reform. After Amon's murder, "the people of the land" once more intervened to ensure Josiah's succession (2 Kgs 21,23 f.). The circumstances of Josiah's early reign also testify to the Yahwistic tradition that had remained firm and constant in Judah despite repression. While 2 Kgs 22,3–23,23 might give the impression that Josiah's reforming activity began only with his eighteenth year of rule, the Chronicler makes it clear that there were stages in the reform. In his eighth regnal year, when he was but sixteen years of age, Josiah "began to seek the God of David his father" (2 Ch 34,3). That is to say, he threw off completely the tradition of Manasseh and Amon; and this shows that at least some of those who were influential in the palace had seen to his proper education. In his twelfth regnal year he instituted a cultic reform to purge Judah of the idolatrous practices that had been encouraged under the previous regimes. Finally, in his eighteenth year (622–621), occurred the Deuteronomic reform that was of primary interest to the Deuteronomist author of Kings.

There would seem to be no doubt that the Book of the Law discovered in the temple during Josiah's eighteenth year, as recounted by both Kings and Chronicles, was the lawcode of Deuteronomy. A modern view of the literary history of this code holds that it was

the developed Mosaic law as taught by the priesthood of northern Israel, which was brought down to Jerusalem after the fall of Samaria. It had been the inspiration of Hezekiah's reform, but during the time of Manasseh and Amon it had been buried and forgotten in the temple. Now it was rediscovered. Josiah was terrified, says the biblical text, at the imprecations which this law pronounced on the people who had not kept it (2 Kgs 22,11–13; 2 Ch 34,19–21). This sounds very much as though he had been hearing the words of Dt 28. Thus this resurrected lawcode became the occasion of the young king's continued reforming zeal.

Josiah's reform was more thoroughgoing than Hezekiah's had been. Hezekiah had distinguished between the "high places" where Yahweh was worshipped at least nominally, and those where syncretistic or Baalistic worship was the rule. Only the latter had been suppressed, and these, of course, had been restored by Manasseh. The reform of Josiah destroyed not only the idolatrous high places, but also those where legitimate Yahwistic worship had been given (2 Kgs 23,8), that is, all the ancient and traditional Israelite shrines and sanctuaries outside the one Jerusalem temple. This was obedience to the full rigor of Dt 12,1–14, which perpetuated the nomadic ideal of a single central place of worship for the tribal federation—an ideal, however, that had never before been implemented, in the north or in the south. In fact, it appears that prophets like Amos and Hosea in northern Israel found nothing wrong in the multiplicity of shrines itself; they were perturbed only by the misuse that was so often made of them. And certainly the ancient stories preserved in the Book of Genesis show an anxiety to connect the patriarchs with virtually all of the traditional holy places of Palestine, thereby indicating that they were fit worshipping places for Yahweh, whatever their Canaanitic, pre-Israelite history.

It is easy to imagine the upheaval that was caused by this royal reform commanded by Josiah. 2 Kgs 23,9 gives a slight indication of it. The law in Dt 18,6–8 provided that priests of the provinces, coming in from the suppressed sanctuaries, were to have equal rights with the priesthood of the central sanctuary when it became

the only sanctuary. This law, however, was not observed, for the Jerusalem priesthood jealously guarded its prerogatives and refused to allow the country priests to participate in the sacrifices. This meant that a great number of priests, not to mention their dependants, no longer had a livelihood. It was as though, in a large diocese, it would suddenly be decided that from now on Mass would be celebrated only in the cathedral church. This comparison is actually weak, since the function of a Christian priest is primarily pastoral rather than ritual, whereas the function of an Old Testament priest was nothing if not ritual. The Deuteronomic reform was the beginning of a policy made official after the exile, when the Jerusalem (Zadokite) priesthood was recognized to be the only priesthood in the full sense, while the remainder of the Levitical priests were now bereft of their sacrificial functions and were reduced to taking care of the menial offices of the temple, as simple Levites. As we see from 2 Kgs 23,15–20, the reform was extended to the north as well as to Judah.

As we shall learn later, there is some doubt as to the attitude adopted toward this reform by the prophet Jeremiah, who was certainly active in Judah during these days of Josiah. It has always caused some remark that there is no mention of Jeremiah in the story told about the reform; instead, the king sought the counsel of a temple prophetess named Huldah. It is quite obvious that the Deuteronomic reform was deemed a holy and necessary work by many spiritually minded Israelites. It is also a fact that Deuteronomy itself had not developed without prophetic influence. When the cult of Yahweh had been spread over the land in the local shrines, it had never been possible to check adequately the tendency toward assimilation with Baalistic worship. The reform was intended as a root-and-branch removal of this occasion of syncretism once and for all, and in this intention it was furthering the prophets' work. But no reform, however well-intentioned and with whatever purity of motive it is begun, can be immune from the danger of degenerating into a formalistic fanaticism. There is cause to believe that such a thing did occur in this case.

There is no doubt, however, that Josiah's action was initially inspired by the highest of principles. And we may be sure, though the author of Kings is silent on the point, that his was a reform that did not stop merely with the externals of religion. Among the "abominations" that he banished from the realm in conformity with the law of Deuteronomy (which, after all, is concerned with many matters besides the cult), there were surely included many of the moral abuses that had been the sad issue of the abandonment of the law by earlier generations (2 Kgs 23,24). Jeremiah would say to Josiah's son and successor: "Your father . . . practised right and righteousness . . . judged the case of the needy and the poor . . ." (Jer 22,15 f.), testifying that in prophetic eyes as well as the eyes of the author of Kings, Josiah did try to fulfil the ideal of Israelitic kingship.

Josiah, however, like Hezekiah before him, was unable to resist to the end the temptation to secure his kingdom by intervention in the tangled politics of the Near East. To the evident disapproval of the biblical author (2 Ch 35,22), in the year 609 Josiah met the Egyptian army of Neco which was en route to attempt the reconquest of Haran for Ashuruballit's crumbling Assyrian empire. Josiah intercepted Neco at Megiddo, and there he died.

It was long thought that 2 Kgs 23,29 was to be translated: "Pharaoh Neco went up against the king of Assyria"; however, it is now known that at the very end of the Assyrian empire, Egypt had at last become its ally.

To support the Chronicler's story of an invasion of Judah by Assyria during Manasseh's reign, the story that we mentioned above in connection with Manasseh's alleged conversion, there is some archeological evidence of an Assyrian occupation of Gezer in the time of Ashurbanipal. At any rate, Ashurbanipal was the last of the kings of Assyria to justify his title, "the Great King." Toward the end of his reign, there were already signs that the great empire was falling apart. In Egypt a strong new dynasty arose, the twenty-sixth, founded by Psammeticus I, who put an end to the civil wars that had debilitated the country, expelled the foreign

leaders who had long dominated the political scene, and made Egypt again a power to be reckoned with. Psammeticus ended by concluding an alliance with Assyria in the face of a new threat rising against their common peace in the Near East, the Chaldeans. It was to honor this alliance that Psammeticus' son Neco II went up, not "against," but "in the aid of" Assyria in 609.

The Chaldeans (such was the name given them by the Assyrians), called by most modern writers the Neo-Babylonians, were a Western Semitic people related closely to the Arameans and not so closely to the Hebrews. They were not lineally descended from the Amorite dynasty of Babylon that had dominated Mesopotamia in the time of the Hebrew patriarchs, but were newcomers to the land long after Babylon had become subject to the Assyrian empire. They had given the Assyrians trouble off and on—one of the times, that of Merodach-baladan, we saw above in the history of Hezekiah. But it was not until after the death of Ashurbanipal that they finally succeeded in establishing a rival kingdom, under a king named Nabopolassar (625–605).

After Ashurbanipal three more Assyrian kings reigned in Nineveh, but they were of so little consequence it is not worth the while to record their names. In 612 a combined force of Chaldeans, Medes, and Scythians stormed the city of Nineveh, took it, and destroyed it. What this astonishing event signified to the contemporary world of the Near East, and especially to those peoples that had so long felt the weight of the Assyrian yoke, we can partly surmise from reading the words of the prophet Nahum. The Tigris River was made the line of division of the former empire, the territory north and east falling to the Medes (and later to the Persians), while the south and west became Chaldean. The last king of Assyria never ruled in Nineveh. This man, Ashuruballit II, managed to hold out a few years at Haran before he was inevitably engulfed by the westward sweep of the Chaldeans. Neco, as we saw, was on the way to help him when he was met by Josiah at Megiddo.

The imminent fall of Assyria had been seized on by Josiah as the signal to break definitively with the failing Mesopotamian over-

lord. For this reason he threw his armies into the field to prevent Egyptian help from bolstering Ashuruballit's lost cause. He was killed in battle at Megiddo, but his intervention may have prevented Neco from reaching Haran in time. His death was not, therefore, unheroic, but it certainly spelled the end of what he had stood for in Judah, as subsequent history was to prove. That history we can best see as the background to the study of Jeremiah's prophecy.

After Assyria was no more, Neco for a time tried to fill the power vacuum in Palestine. In 605, however, he himself was defeated at Carchemish by the Chaldeans who were led by Nebuchadnezzar, Nabopolassar's son and general. From this time on, Babylon became the dominant power to overshadow the remainder of Judah's history. The same year that he defeated Neco, Nebuchadnezzar, as the second of that name, became king of Babylonia and lord of Syria and Palestine.

With the foregoing in mind, we may now consider the following "minor" prophets.

2. NAHUM OF ELKOSH

There is not much need to comment on the short prophecy of Nahum, which can be read in a few minutes and which presents few problems of interpretation. Though the work as we have it gives evidence of being a collection of oracles edited like the rest of the prophetic books, it makes fairly consistent reading. It is an unmitigated doom-prediction for Nineveh, whose end, as the enemy of Yahweh and his people, is confidently and cheerfully foreseen. Nineveh's fall, the prophet believed, would mean the restoration of Israel and Judah. The hated city that had become the very image of the alien, anti-Yahwistic world, is here gleefully celebrated in its decline and fall.

It should also be recognized that Nahum's prophecy is that of a man who is a thoroughgoing Israelite in his religion. He is certainly not opposed to Assyria on any purely political grounds, like the

pro-Egyptian or pro-Babylonian nationalistic prophets of the type that Jeremiah attacked so vigorously. It is therefore not correct to say, as some modern critics have, that we have in Nahum the kind of prophecy that Jeremiah repudiated. It is true, at least to the extent that we possess his words, Nahum does not show himself to have been a prophet of Jeremiah's sensitivity. But for all that, we cannot rightly conclude that we know more about him than we do. Nahum accounts for but a few lines gathered together in our Bible. Despite the fact, therefore, that the little book contains no condemnation of Judah's sins, we have no way of knowing that Nahum was not as unsparing a critic of his people as were Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Micah, in oracles, perhaps, that have not come down to us. Furthermore, it is likely that Nahum belongs to the early days of Josiah, when much good was imminently expected of the reform. Jeremiah's words from this same period are also very few. Our judgments in Nahum's case must, of necessity, be based on too little evidence to be really just.

The little record we have of Nahum's work has as its corollary the lack of practically all information about the prophet himself, apart from his name. He has impressed many modern commentators as a cult prophet; it is, for that matter, not unlikely that he was one of those temple prophets whom the Bible associates with Josiah in the work of his reform (2 Kgs 23,2). However, there seems to be less probability for the view of his prophecy as a kind of liturgy sung to celebrate the end of Nineveh.

The situation of Elkosh, Nahum's place of origin, is unknown. The prophet's dates can hardly be made more precise than some time before the fall of Nineveh in 612, and after 663, the year of the Assyrian conquest of No-Amon (Thebes), mentioned in 3,8. Probably, in view of the complacent satisfaction with which he contemplates the certainty of Nineveh's fall, he uttered his prophecy within a decade or so of the actual event, once it had become clear to him at last that Assyria was doomed. It has been guessed that his oracles might be dated as early as 632, owing their inspiration to

Josiah's early rejection of the Assyrian alliance (2 Ch 34,3). It is also possible that the poetry of the first chapter was written after Nineveh had actually fallen.

3. ZEPHANIAH BEN CUSHI

We are told in 1,1 that Zephaniah prophesied during the days of Josiah, and the content of his prophecy would cause us to believe that he was active during Josiah's minority, before the great reform was under way. Today the substance of almost the entire prophecy goes without challenge. If there have been any subsequent additions to Zephaniah's work, they appear possibly here and there in 2,4–15, in the oracles against foreign nations—always an area where later Jewish authors were tempted to enlarge—and, probably, in 3,14–17, which may reflect the period after his prophecies of doom had been fulfilled.

We know nothing of the prophet other than from his writing, which is of a very high quality. He is called the son of Cushi (which means "the Ethiopian"), and, quite exceptionally, his genealogy is traced to the fourth generation, back to a certain Hezekiah. This has led to the conjecture that the Hezekiah in question might have been the king. It is, of course, a possibility, though there is no further evidence to confirm it, just as there is none to rule it out peremptorily. Zephaniah is, in any case, a prophet in the line of Amos and Hosea, Micah and Isaiah; his condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem is in the classic mold.

Zephaniah begins with a picture of universal devastation, in which Judah is to play its part. The "day of Yahweh" we saw already in Amos. Its representation, as here, as a universal judgment will later become a favorite theme of the "apocalyptic" writers. Having denounced the idolatry and syncretism of those Judahites (1,4–6) "who bow down and swear by Yahweh, yet swear by Milkom (the Ammonite god of human sacrifice)," the prophet announces the significance of the day of Yahweh for Judah:

Silence before the Lord Yahweh,
for near is Yahweh's day!
For Yahweh has prepared a sacrifice,
he has sanctified his guests.
And it shall be on the day of Yahweh's sacrifice:
"I shall descend on the princes, on the king's sons,
on all who disport themselves in foreign attire.
I shall descend on that day
on all who leap across the threshold,
who fill their lord's house with violence and fraud" (1,7–9).

This is specifically a repudiation of the royal ministers, the "king's sons," who overshadowed the court during Josiah's minority. Held over from the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, they were pro-Assyrian to the core, hence in "foreign attire." The next-to-last line is wholly obscure: no really satisfactory meaning has been assigned the idiom that is involved there. There is no question about the drift of the last line, however. These men are being indicted not merely for their favor of foreign ways, but for their active denial of the moral law of Yahweh in their public administration. This is brought out clearly in what follows, where the condemnation becomes more general:

"And there shall be in that day—oracle of Yahweh—
the sound of a wailing from the Fish Gate,
a howling from the New City,
a great crashing from the heights.
Howl, dwellers in the Maktesh![1]
for the merchant people has perished;
the weighers of money are cut off.

[1] The prophet is referring to various sectors in the northern part of Jerusalem, the part that would feel the first shock of an invading army. Presumably the Maktesh ("Mortar") was such a sector, though it is otherwise unknown by this name.

At that time, I shall search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I shall descend upon the people,
they who grow dull in their dregs,
who say in their hearts:
'Yahweh will do no good,
nor will he do evil.'
Their wealth shall be given to plunder,
their houses to devastation.
They shall build houses,
but dwell not within them;
they shall plant vineyards,
but drink not of their wine" (1,10–13).

The last lines are a reprise of Am 5,11, which, of course, Zephaniah very easily could have known.

All Jerusalem is like wine gone bad. Here again, as in Hos 12,8, we find the people compared to dishonest merchants, trusting in their wealth, careless of the means by which it has been obtained, and heedless of the judgments of Yahweh. Practically, they are atheists. Or, what is worse, their idea of God is wholly amoral.

Once again the prophet adverts to the rulers and leaders of Judah:

Woe to the rebellious and defiled,
the oppressing city!
She hears no voice,
she accepts no correction;
she trusts not in Yahweh,
she will not draw near her God.
Her princes within her
are roaring lions;
her judges are evening wolves
who leave nothing for the morning.
Her prophets are vain,
men of deceits;

her priests profane the holy,
violate the law (3,1–4).

As in Hos 4,1–6, the priests do violence to the *torah*, the law which it was their duty to teach, opposing in deed and in word the holy within their jurisdiction, not only in the cult but in the moral code necessarily included in the *torah*. Judah's prophets are false prophets. Judges and civil officials are predatory, in the mode with which the past history of Israel and Judah has already made us familiar. The conspiracy of the powerful against the humble of the land, the order of the day inherited from Manasseh and Amon, is now perpetuated by the reigning bureaucrats under Josiah. So much is this true, that Zephaniah takes a step that was not taken even by Amos, the great defender of the poor of Israel. For he says:

Seek Yahweh, all you humble of the land,
who do the right he commands;
seek righteousness, seek humility.
Perhaps you may escape
on the day of Yahweh's wrath (2,3).

Like Amos, Zephaniah is hesitant to ascribe the disposition of mercy to Yahweh in the face of the nation's guilt, yet he ascribes it all the same. What is of chief interest in this verse is the coming to term of a train of thought begun by Amos and Isaiah, whereby "the humble of the land" have now become fully convertible with "the righteous." Originally a purely economic expression, through the long history of social oppression in Israel and Judah "humble" has taken on a connotation that was not its by right, which it owes rather to the failure of a human justice that Yahweh will not permit to prevail. The humble man, who has no hope of redress or of elementary decent treatment from the institutions of man, is the man who awaits his vindication from Yahweh in patience, putting his

faith in him alone and obeying his law. By the same token, "humility," the quality of "the humble," is for Zephaniah a virtue to be laid in parallel with righteousness. We are brought one step nearer the New Testament fulfilment: "Blessed are the poor in spirit"—which is to say, "Blessed are they who have the spirit of the poor."

Zephaniah's message is regrettably brief, but its significance can hardly be questioned in view of these contributions. In his few lines he has compressed much of the substance of prophetic teaching on the true nature of religion and the consequences of its present decay into vain forms of no vital and felt meaning.

4. HABAKKUK

Habakkuk is without doubt one of the most mysterious and perplexing figures in the history of Israelitic prophetism. His very name, anomalous in Hebrew, is uncertain in view of the ancient Greek transliterations (Ambakuk or Abbakum). About him we have not a single biographical fact, in his prophecy or without it. This has understandably given rise to much heated debate among the scholars who have tried to fit Habakkuk in his precise niche within the development of prophetism. Even in ancient times he was the subject of more than average interest and speculation. His seems to have been the kind of fascination that makes for legend and anecdote. He figures in the rather curious story of Dn 14,33–39—if, indeed, it was really this Habakkuk that the author had in mind.

Among the first writings discovered in 1947 belonging to the Jewish community of New Testament times that had inhabited Qumran near the Dead Sea, the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls, was a free commentary on the Book of Habakkuk. This type of commentary, to which the technical name *pesher* has been given, made no attempt to expound the historical sense of the prophecy, but was rather a loose extension or application of its words, verse by verse, to the events of contemporary history or of the recent past. There

is no question that the book was felt by the Qumran sectaries to have been a very important one in the tradition of prophecy.

For all its brevity, the Book of Habakkuk has been subjected to as much destructive criticism as any other part of the Bible. Both its date and its subject matter are still highly controverted.

At first glance, there would seem to be very little difficulty about the date of the prophecy. In 1,6 mention is made of the Chaldeans, who are even now being raised up to be the instrument of Yahweh's wrath. This would demand that the book had been written before 605, the year of the battle of Carchemish, after which the Chaldean domination of Palestine had become a *fait accompli;* and it could hardly have been written before 625, when the Neo-Babylonian empire had been begun by Nabopolassar. Therefore, we should have no problem in recognizing the prophecies in 1,2–4 and similar passages as directed against the Egyptian-run Judahite government that succeeded after Josiah's death. This, as a matter of fact, is the oldest interpretation of the book known to both Jews and Christians, and it is the one that I propose to follow, though I shall state briefly what are the other possibilities. I believe that we should see in Habakkuk a prophet contemporary with Jeremiah, doing the same work as Jeremiah.

Against this interpretation it is urged, for the sake of the unity of the prophecy, that 1,2–4 must refer to an enemy external to Judah. By some, this enemy is taken to be the Assyrians, from whom Judah was to be delivered by the Chaldeans. Others, relying on a supposed continuity of 1,12–17 with 1,5–11 and the affinity of 1,2–4 for 1,12–17, consider that all these verses refer to the Chaldeans. In both these acceptations, Habakkuk becomes a prophet exclusively concerned with the salvation of Judah, very like Nahum. To judge whether one or the other should be followed, we must first look carefully at 1,2–4:

> How long, O Yahweh, must I cry,
> and you hear not?
> must I denounce violence to you,

and you save not?
Why do you make me see evil,
and look on wrongdoing?
Oppression and violence are before me;
there is strife, and dissension arises.
So that the law languishes,
and the right never emerges.
For the wicked encompasses the righteous,
so that the right goes forth perverted.

It is hard, I believe, and quite unnatural, to understand these verses as anything other than a reproach of the prophet's own people. They breathe with a vocabulary and a purpose that had been set long ago by earlier prophets. Their most obvious acceptation, particularly as the prophet grieves over the suppression of "the law" and "right," is that they are a diatribe against the type of wrongdoing with which Amos and Hosea and Micah have acquainted us. The best commentary on them would appear to be Am 2,6 f., which in part employs the same language.

If we do once agree that these initial words are directed against Judah, then it is easy and a matter of course to understand the following vv. 5–11 as Yahweh's reply to the lament: the Chaldeans, the scourge of the East, are to exercise sure and certain judgment on this sinful nation. There is no indication, however, that vv. 12–17 (and 2,1) are intended to continue the description of the ruthlessness of the Chaldeans. Rather, these verses have an acknowledged affinity with 1,2–4; and they may much more readily be taken as a companion lament to the first—whether they are from the same or another of the prophet's inspirations, is immaterial. The wicked one who, in v. 17, "slays peoples without mercy," may be understood as I propose to understand the similar expressions of c. 2.

The second chapter, from v. 2 on, has as its unity a series of imprecations read by the prophet at Yahweh's command against one

"whose soul is not upright within him" (v. 4a). Of this one it is said in antithesis that

> The righteous shall live by his faith (2,4b).

The Hebrew word *emunah*, "faith," is closely related to the *emeth*, "fidelity," that we have already seen a number of times. The man who puts his faith in Yahweh, according to Is 28,16, is the man who practices the right and righteousness decreed by Yahweh. Here, too, where "faith" is the quality opposed to that of the man who is "not upright," it is obvious that it entails obedience to the Lord's law and covenant. Faith is an affirmation, man's response to God, in which he commits his whole person, mind, and will to the divine direction. It is the action of a righteous man, and it is this commitment that makes him righteous.

Is Habakkuk contrasting "righteous" Judah with the "not upright" Chaldean? There are many who think so, who consequently find in the entire c. 2 a polemic against a personified Babylonia. Or is "the righteous" the faithful Judahite, whose fidelity separates him from the apostate nation condemned, as I conceive it to have been, in 1,2–4? If the latter is the prophet's meaning, then c. 2 is likewise aimed at the iniquitous of Judah who have brought it to its doom.

Of the one "whose soul is not upright within him," Yahweh pronounces:

> For indeed, riches deceive;
> the arrogant man shall not prosper,[2]
> who widens his appetite like Sheol,
> who like Death is never filled;
> who gathers to himself all nations,
> and collects to himself all peoples (2,5).

[2] In these lines I make use of the text of Hb preserved in the Qumran *pesher*, which makes better sense than the received Hebrew text.

Against such a one, asks Yahweh, shall not a taunt be uttered? (v. 6).

The "nations" and "peoples" of this verse, together with the kindred expressions in vv. 8 and 13 (and 1,17), have been taken as irrefutable proof that the prophet's recriminations must concern the Babylonians. A powerful, ruthless nation is obviously in question. But they may just as readily be understood of the wicked Judahite king Jehoiakim, of whom we shall learn when we examine the prophecy of Jeremiah, the Jehoiakim who was the satellite of the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco. A Judahite prophet would have ascribed to the creature Jehoiakim all the vices of his Egyptian creator, and conversely. Neco, of course, was still at this time one of the major tyrants of the Near East, and in Palestinian eyes the very symbol of a destroying foreign power. This interpretation of Habakkuk's text, which has been proposed again quite recently,[3] I find rather attractive.

No matter who may have been the precise target of the passage, however, it is in any case clear that the prophet has phrased his charge in terms habitually used by the prophets to denounce the sins of Israelites. Thus 2,6–8 speak of the oppression of poor men in the same way that Amos did, which might lead us to think that the "blood of men and violence of the land" has a meaning like that of the equivalent expression in Hos 4,1–4. The oracle in vv. 9–11 strongly echoes Am 3,10, while v. 12 f. against "him who builds a city with blood" find a counterpart in Micah's oracle (3,10) against Jerusalem. The woe uttered in v. 15 f. against the man who makes his neighbor drunk would seem strange if it were to be referred to a foreigner.

In v. 17 the "violence of Lebanon" and "destruction of cattle" (that is, of the beasts of burden used to transport the Lebanese

[3] Among others, by Friedrich Horst (in Robinson-Horst's *Die zwölf kleinen Propheten* [Tübingen: Mohr, ²1954], pp. 177–183), who connects Hb 2,6b with the taxation mentioned by 2 Kgs 23,33 ff., and points out that the type of construction supposed in Hb 2,11 is Palestinian (or Assyrian), but not Chaldean.

cedar?) imply a spoliation of Phoenicia, but not necessarily one that involved warfare—as in Zeph 1,11 and Hos 12,8 ff., "violence" can refer to the antisocial aspects of a commercial venture. These words are close to those of Jer 22,13 ff., which we shall see later on, rebuking Jehoiakim's display of wealth in Jerusalem. It is altogether in keeping with the supposition that a domestic tyrant is meant in these imprecations that the final vv. 18–20 condemn idolatry in the name of the Jerusalem temple.

The reader may feel that this insistence on Habakkuk's prophecy as a denunciation of Judahite king and society has been unduly protracted. However, if the acceptation I advocate is correct, it is important for showing the consistency and continuity of prophetism in these matters.

The final c. 3 of Habakkuk is a psalm. Because of the difficulty of fitting it into the preceding context, there was a time when critics almost unhesitatingly ascribed it to another author of another, later period. Nowadays, however, as a result of the re-evaluation of the prophets' relation to the national cult, it will be generally agreed that there is no real reason to look beyond Habakkuk himself for the explanation of its inclusion in the prophecy. The psalm is a hymn celebrating Yahweh's manifestation of himself to his people, and may very well have been adapted from the liturgy of the Jerusalem temple.

I have called these three, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk, "minor prophets" in no deprecating sense, but in the sense in which all the prophets besides Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel have been traditionally classed as "minor," that is, in respect to the volume of their recorded work. The distinction is quantitative, not qualitative. When all is said and done, however, it must also be admitted that neither is any one of these prophets the equal of an Amos or a Micah, let alone an Isaiah or a Jeremiah. It is both striking and unfortunate, that in the entire three quarters of a century that elapsed from the decline of Hezekiah to the accession of

Josiah no such comparable prophet arose in Israel. It is all the more to be deplored, since it was precisely during these tragic days of Manasseh and Amon that there was the greatest need for prophecy. Continuity there was, as our sources can show, but it was a continuity of the weakest kind until the coming of Jeremiah.

CHAPTER NINE

Jeremiah ben Hilkiah

A NOTE ON THE TEXT OF JEREMIAH'S PROPHECIES

Jeremiah is the most thoroughly documented of all the prophets whom we see in this book. As might be expected, however, his collection of prophecies carries with it its own problems quite distinct from those of the other prophetical books. As it stands in its present Hebrew text, the Book of Jeremiah is obviously the result of an editorial plan: cc. 1–25 are, in general, prophecies against Judah; cc. 26–45 are mainly devoted to stories about Jeremiah; cc. 46–51 are a collection of prophecies against foreign nations; and in c. 52, just as in the Book of Isaiah, there appears an historical supplement, here borrowed from 2 Kgs 24,18–25,21.

The Greek Septuagint version displays a different order of this material, placing the oracles against the nations after c. 25 and arranging them differently. Also, the Greek text is about one-eighth shorter than the Hebrew. These variations indicate that the Jeremianic collection had a prehistory of smaller collections in various forms. Practically everyone would agree, however, that it is the Hebrew text that takes us back more directly and more consistently to the prophet Jeremiah himself.

In c. 36 we are told how the collection began. In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim, i.e., in 605 B.C., *the year of Nebuchadnezzar's triumph at Carchemish, under divine inspiration the prophet dictated to his disciple Baruch "all the words against Israel, Judah, and*

all the nations" that he had uttered since his first days of prophecy. After this scroll had been destroyed by the cynical king, Baruch wrote another, again at Jeremiah's dictation, which repeated all the words of the first scroll, "and in addition many others of like nature."

That this scroll has been a principal source of the Book of Jeremiah, no one will doubt. Whether or not it is possible to reconstruct its original features, however, is another question. Our canonical book has not drawn on it directly, but indirectly, through later collections of Jeremianic material that had already made use of it and other sources.

Modern critics have found it more convenient to classify the existing material into three categories. First of all are the oracles and first-person accounts that come from Jeremiah himself. This category is already larger than the original scroll, which took the prophet only up to the fourth year of Jehoiakim. Secondly, we have the accounts about Jeremiah in the third person. These have a consistent style, which is probably to be ascribed to Baruch. Finally, there is a good quantity of material that has a strong literary affinity with the distinctive style of the Deuteronomic historical school—the writers who are responsible for the basic theme and development of the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. This final category of material is not to be considered un-Jeremian; but the prophet's words have been re-edited from their (probably) original poetic form into the prose style of Deuteronomy. Of course, as in all the prophetic books, there is a certain amount of the material of the Book of Jeremiah that comes from later writers.

As a composite of the sources just named, the book is distributed as follows:

Cc. 1–6 consist of oracles from the time of Josiah. Everything in these chapters (after the editorial introduction in 1,1–3) comes from the prophet himself, and most of it was doubtless in the original scroll dictated to Baruch. Cc. 7–20 contain, for the most part, oracles from the time of Jehoiakim. Here the editor has made use of all three sources for Jeremiah. Among the words that come directly from the prophet in this section are his intimate self-reve-

lations that have been dubbed his "Confessions" (i.e., 11,18–12,6; 15,10–21; 17,12–18; 18,18–23; 20,7–18); these surely were not part of Baruch's first scroll (which contained only oracles "against"). At one time, cc. 7–20 were evidently followed immediately by 25, 1–14 (also dated in Jehoiakim's time). Sometime later there was the insertion of cc. 21–24, a collection of oracles from the latter period of Jeremiah's ministry, also drawn from all three of the sources.

The latter half of c. 25, vv. 15–38, originally went (as the Septuagint order shows) with cc. 46–51, the collection of Jeremiah's oracles against foreign nations. Some of these oracles were undoubtedly in Baruch's scroll. Chiefly within this section has the Book of Jeremiah undergone expansion and supplementation at the hands of later Jewish authors.

The first part of the largely narrative section of cc. 26–45, that is, the part down to the end of c. 35, is mainly given over to Jeremiah's prophecies of salvation for Israel and Judah. In particular, cc. 30–31 consist of words that come directly from Jeremiah, while the remainder of the material is from the other two sources. The final narrative cc. 36–45 are a history of Jeremiah by Baruch, containing, here and there, the prophet's own words.

It is easily apparent that this book is in its own way quite unique among the prophetic collections. It would obviously require more detail than we can allow ourselves here to run through the various passages which, for one reason or another, are not believed to be Jeremiah's work. In any case, the critics take exception to far fewer of these passages now than they were once prone to do. Even the Deuteronomic material, by and large, is conceded to go back to and to presuppose genuine Jeremian words for its inspiration.

1. THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAH

After Josiah's death at Megiddo, there ensued in Judah the struggle for power that has been recorded in 2 Kgs 23,30–37 and 2 Ch 36,1–4. Eliakim, Josiah's eldest son, was passed over by "the

people of the land," evidently on the assumption that his younger brother Jehoahaz was the more likely to continue his father's policies. Of this Jehoahaz, who is called Shallum by Jeremiah (22,11) and in 2 Ch 3,15 (presumably the name given him at birth as distinct from his royal name), we know practically nothing. Pharaoh Neco, who now considered himself to have inherited Assyria's overlordship of Syria and Palestine, insisted on replacing him with Eliakim, and the misgivings that had been shown with regard to the latter were quickly justified by the events. The change of Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim was a formality by which Neco asserted his suzerainty. The name is a Yahwistic one, and thus was probably the actual choice of the people or of Jehoiakim himself. Jehoiakim, however, speedily became the tool and exponent of those priests, false prophets, and princes of Judah who continued to preside over the land in Jerusalem in flat contradiction of every ideal that had been fostered by Josiah. And they had now the support and mainstay of the ephemeral, but still decisive Egyptian government.

In Jehoiakim's time the cleavage between the capital city and the rest of the country seems to have become accentuated as never before. The tribute exacted of him by Neco as the price of his accession, he passed down as a tax on "the people of the land" who had tried to prevent his reign (2 Kgs 23,33.35). Wealth was concentrated in Jerusalem while the countryside had begun to decline economically. Invariably Jeremiah centers his attention on Jerusalem as the epitome of all that was wrong with Judah, condemning its foolish and vulgar display of wealth while the provinces declined. Significantly, the archeology of Lachish has revealed that this city was never really rebuilt after Sennacherib. The people continued to live in ruins, and the only progress achieved was in raising defence works.

Recently published supplements to the Babylonian chronicles faithfully kept by the Chaldean kings have helped us in reconstructing Judah's final days as they relate to the larger history of the times. We now know that the last of the Assyrian kings,

Ashuruballit II, had fled from his sole remaining stronghold at Haran in 610 B.C., and in the following year was attempting to regain it. In this endeavor Neco had been speeding to his aid when met by Josiah at Megiddo, with such tragic consequences for Judah and its king. As we have noted, the attempted reconquest of Haran was unsuccessful, and Ashuruballit thereupon drops out of history, together with the Assyrian empire. In March or April of 605 Nebuchadnezzar defeated Neco at Carchemish, ending the Egyptian control of Syria-Palestine. In August or September of that same year Nebuchadnezzar succeeded to the Babylonian throne on the death of his father, the empire-builder Nabopolassar, and in the following year he was back in Palestine, battling with Neco over the cities of Philistia.

If Jeremiah's advice had been heeded, Judah would now have submitted to Chaldean rule, which was relatively enlightened in contrast to the ruthless absolutism of Assyria. It would then have been free to work out its destinies with a certain measure of independence, as so many of its little neighboring states did. But Jehoiakim was as deaf to Jeremiah's counsel as Ahaz had been to Isaiah's.

In November or December of 604, we now know from the completed Babylonian chronicles, Nebuchadnezzar captured Ashkelon. This fact throws light on the fast proclaimed at that time in Jerusalem (cf. Jer 36,9), presumably in fear of the advancing Chaldeans. A certain extra-biblical confirmation is now had, therefore, for what some critics previously had deemed a biblical fiction, that there was a conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar during Jehoiakim's time (2 Kgs 24,1; 2 Ch 36,6 f.; Dn 1,1 f.). The Babylonian texts do not record such a conquest, it is true, but they make it the more likely by putting Nebuchadnezzar in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Jehoiakim probably surrendered the city peacefully, to avoid the destruction that Nebuchadnezzar had come prepared to effect.[1] By so doing, Jehoiakim became a vassal of the Chaldeans,

[1] Note that in the text mentioned, the Chronicler does not say that Nebuchadnezzar actually transported the king to Babylon, but that he was ready to do so.

though we know from Jeremiah that he retained all his pro-Egyptian sympathies.

There were limits even to Nebuchadnezzar's abilities. In 601 he was repulsed in his efforts to invade Egypt, and he had to return to Babylon to recoup his forces; here he remained the following year. As was so usual in these affairs, once again this opportunity was seized by Chaldean subject states to make a bid for their freedom. Jehoiakim himself rebelled, and set in motion a series of Babylonian campaigns that would end in the annihilation of Judah. Jehoiakim died a discredited and defeated king whose son was not permitted to perpetuate his memory.

Here I reproduce the Babylonian chronicle of Nebuchadnezzar's final campaign against Jerusalem, inserting a few explanations in brackets:

> In the seventh year, the month Kislev [i.e., between December of 598 and January of 597], the king of Akkad [Babylonia] gathered his army and proceeded to the land of Hattu [Syria-Palestine]. He besieged the city of Judah, and on the second day of the month Adar [i.e., 15/16 March 597] he took the city, seized its king [who was now the lad Jehoiachin], and substituted a king who was pleasing to himself [namely, Zedekiah]. He took a heavy tribute and carried it back to Babylon.

During the siege, Jehoiakim had died. As Jeremiah had predicted, Egypt did not come to the aid of Jerusalem. Neco remained behind the Wadi el-Arish (cf. 2 Kgs 24,7).

Thus the youthful Jehoiachin, called Coniah by Jeremiah, inherited the siege of Jerusalem from his father. He was carried off to Babylon, where he remained a prisoner for thirty-seven years. His lot was not a hard one—Babylonian records detail the allowances that were provided for his table, for he was treated as a hostage prince—but he was never to return to Judah. Further, the temple and the city of Jerusalem had been pillaged, Judah itself

had been overrun by an invading army, and its most influential citizens had been deported to Babylon. Among these latter was a certain Ezekiel ben Buzi, who was to be the first prophet to receive his call to prophecy outside the Promised Land. Judah had been dealt a blow from which it never recovered.

The king whom Nebuchadnezzar put on the throne of David was Mattaniah, also a son of Josiah, who took the name Zedekiah. Zedekiah, whose character is carefully delineated in the Book of Jeremiah, proved to be a comic-opera king, not an evil man but an incapable bungler, surrounded by second-rate advisers who from force of habit kept up the agitation for political independence without the ability to provide it with any real leadership. Religious observance had gone from bad to worse; the worship of Yahweh had become a pure formalism, and superstitious and pagan rites of all kinds were as common as in the worst times of Ahaz or Manasseh. The general poverty into which Judah had descended heightened rather than levelled off the social and economic differences that divided the people from their masters. Typical of the mentality that governed Jerusalem, and indicative of the pass to which the nation had come, is the story that Jeremiah tells, as we shall see, of the treatment accorded the debt-slaves, a class that had doubtless grown beyond all bounds in these latter years, through the repeated wars and invasions that had consumed precarious fortunes and forced many into bankruptcy.

So widened had become the chasm between wealthy and poor, for a great number of Judahites the Babylonian conquest proved to be a species of liberation. In Jer 39,8–10 we read that, after the Chaldeans had burnt the royal palace and houses of Jerusalem and transported its inhabitants to Babylon, "those of the people who were poor, who had nothing at all, Nebuzaradan chief of the guards left in Judah and gave vineyards and fields that day." When Nebuchadnezzar smashed the last anti-Babylonian alliance in 586 and reduced Jerusalem to an utter waste, he only put into brutal externals the dissolution of a nation that had occurred morally long before.

Jeremiah, who lived through Zedekiah's reign, confidently predicted this ultimate end. He had despaired of the reform of the existing Israel. He prophesied the coming of a new, spiritual covenant, and he put his hope in the regenerative power of the exile to bring this about, advising the exiled already in Babylon not to yearn for a premature overthrow of their captors, but to settle down in Mesopotamia and there to await the new Israel.

The prophet's expectations began to be fulfilled when Zedekiah at length gave in to his counsellors and rebelled against Babylon. After a hopeless resistance, the poor king was captured in ignominious flight from Jerusalem, blinded, and taken away to Babylon. Jerusalem was sacked, the temple was razed, and the city walls were torn down. Everything of value was carried off. The officials and royal ministers were either executed or deported, along with a major part of the population. Judah was at an end.

What remained was anarchy, barely camouflaged with a semblance of law and order. Jewish nationalism quickly degenerated into terrorism and purposeless fanaticism. The states bordering on Judah eagerly awaited their opportunity, which was soon to be realized, of occupying whatever parts of the country they could turn to their own advantage. The Babylonians had appointed as their governor a certain Gedeliah, a man of a distinguished Judahite family, who was soon murdered by the disgruntled extremists, now no better than common outlaws. With his death Judah was left absolutely defenceless, without a government, underpopulated, and easy prey for any interloper. So it was to remain, a ghost land, until the postexilic restoration, and even for some years after the restoration had nominally taken place.

Jeremiah was forced to accompany the Jewish terrorists into exile in Egypt after their senseless murder of Gedeliah. There he continued to prophesy for an undetermined length of time before he passed from history. With him passed the last of Israel. Ezekiel, in far-off Babylon, was to preside over the birth of Judaism.

2. THE RELUCTANT PROPHET

Jeremiah ties together the course of the prophetism of the seventh century as Isaiah does that of the eighth. His career began, we are told, in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (1,2; 25,3), that is to say, about 626; since he was still a youth at this time (1,6), he could hardly have been born more than twenty years before this date. He was, therefore, active throughout the period of the Josian reform, and he saw some of Judah's best as well as its worst efforts in the final disintegration of the kingdom.

Jeremiah is the first prophet about whom it is actually possible to construct some sort of a "life." Baruch has furnished us with a detailed biography, which, however, begins only with Jeremiah's life under Jehoiakim; for his earlier career of the time of Josiah we must piece the facts together from the prophet's own words. Luckily, no other prophet has better connected himself and his personal life with the content of his prophecy than has Jeremiah. Dr. A. B. Davidson's reflection on this truth has achieved the dignity of an apothegm: "Prophecy had already taught its truths, its last effort was to reveal itself in a life," and that life was Jeremiah's.

The inseparable mingling of life and prophecy is manifest in Jeremiah's first words, in the account of his call to prophecy in 1,4–10. It is impossible to avoid contrasting his diffidence at the prospect revealed to him with the ringing eagerness of Isaiah's cry, "Send me!" The contrast is, in every way, surely an instructive one.

The youth which Jeremiah alleged against his call was, indeed, a valid consideration in the face of the message with which he was to be charged,

> over nations and over kingdoms,
> to root up and to tear down,
> to destroy and to overthrow,
> to build and to plant (1,10).

But above all Jeremiah was a naturally timid man, in no way suited by experience or by inclination to cope with the stony-hearted, unprincipled, timeserving advocates of the higher perversity with whom his prophetic office must inevitably involve him. In Yahweh's promise of grace he could fully believe, and in its strength he could press forward, but nothing could ever minimize the reality of the dangers with which he knew himself to be faced day in and out, nor could it mitigate the suffering which is the only condition for a man of such sensitivity forced into the position that was his. If there is something fine in human fulfilment when a courageous man faces up boldly and without even counting the consequences to say what must be said ever so often to the high and mighty of this world, it is even more wonderful when the deed is done by one who we know is secretly shaking in his boots, driven by obedience to a power outside himself that leads him where he would not willingly go. Truly, man is often at his noblest when he is acting least like the man that he is. Here we enter the mysterious realm of *charisma*, where the thoroughgoing materialist—if such there be—must endure scandal and outrage at the obvious subversion of the laws of causality. Jeremiah's life has demonstrated as nothing else could just what prophetic faith could really do.

It is for this reason that the "Confessions" of Jeremiah (11,18–12,6; 15,10–21; 17,12–18; 18,18–23; 20,7–18) will always have a special interest for the reader. These passages do not come from any single moment in the prophet's long and varied career, but we should probably not be wrong in dating most of them to the hard days of Jehoiakim's persecution. The first of them was the issue of an attempt on Jeremiah's life by his own brethren at Anathoth who were trying to stifle his prophecy. Of this we shall have more to say further on.

In these passages Jeremiah bares his soul quite as frankly as do so many of the psalmists in the Book of Psalms. It seems more likely that they were not originally intended for publication, but were in the nature of private meditations in which the prophet discoursed

intimately with his God. They are, we need hardly remind ourselves, the meditations of a holy man of the Old Testament, not of a Christian saint. When Jeremiah prays with respect to his enemies,

> Pick them out like sheep for the slaughter,
> set them aside for the day of slaughter (12,3),

he is not seeking a mean and selfish vengeance, rather he is asking the Lord to punish wickedness. Nevertheless, a Christian saint would be somewhat less inclined to identify himself so personally with the right which God is petitioned to vindicate.

Not entirely Christian, too, must we judge the following prayer, which, however, could have been uttered only by one on terms of the utmost familiarity with God:

> Woe to me, my mother, that you gave me birth,
> a man of strife and contention to the whole land!
> I neither lend nor borrow,
> yet everyone curses me. . . .
> Because I bear your name upon me,
> O Yahweh, God of Sebaoth,
> I have not sat in the midst of merrymakers,
> I have not rejoiced.
> Because your hand was upon me I have sat alone,
> because you have filled me with indignation.
> Why is my pain unceasing,
> my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?
> You have become to me like a deceiving brook,
> waters that do not remain! (15,10.16–18).

Here was no man who enjoyed standing against the crowd, one of those needed in every age and civilization, who gain in strength

from swimming against the current. Jeremiah did not at all relish the role in which he had been cast, a pariah from the society which Yahweh's command forced him to contradict. His concluding words, the fruit of a bitter brooding, would be blasphemous on the lips of anyone less assured than he of the right to talk back to God. Even Jeremiah realizes that they have gone too far and that he has spoken rashly, for in the following lines (vv. 19–21) Yahweh has him recognize his danger of becoming like one of the rebellious people against whom he has been set. Once again, he must walk in faith, trusting in the Lord to hold him up in the inevitable struggles that lie ahead.

Jeremiah was obviously a lonely man, as only one can be lonely who has felt the sure hand of God. This loneliness he graphically describes in 16,1–13, together with his inspired interpretation of its meaning. Excluded from the normal ways of men, denied the consolation of wife and family that for the Semite crystallized the very purpose of life, it was perhaps a meagre enough compensation for him to know that he was figuring in his life as well as in his words the destiny that God had in store for his people. His bitter imprecations in 18,18–23 on the occasion of another plot against his life, and his final eloquent complaint in 20,7–18, show how little he ever managed to reconcile himself to his unwanted calling.

You have seduced me, O Yahweh,
  I have been seduced.
You are stronger than I,
  thus you have prevailed.
I have become a laughingstock all day long;
  everyone mocks me.
For whenever I speak, I must shout:
  "Violence and destruction" is my cry.
For the word of Yahweh has become for me
  ridicule and reproach all day long.
Then I say, "I will not mention him,

no longer will I speak in his name."
But in my heart there comes a burning like fire,
deep in my bones.
I grow weary holding it in,
and I cannot (20,7–9).

Jeremiah has no illusions about his own heroism, as once again he dares to rebuke the Lord. More than willingly would he have shirked the terrible duty that God had imposed on him, to reveal the divine mind to a scoffing generation. Yet he was under compulsion to preach a word that was not his. And, as before, he can only take refuge in his one certainty:

But Yahweh is with me like a terrible warrior:
my persecutors will stumble,
they will not overwhelm me (v. 11).

This revelation which Jeremiah has given us of himself should help us to assess the true meaning of Baruch's chronicle of the prophet's sufferings. But for it, there could be the temptation to compare him—as certain ones have, indeed, compared him—with, say, the modern neutralist or other espouser of unpopular causes who can hardly fail to run afoul of the jingoistic society in which he lives. Jeremiah, however, was no fanatic, not a doctrinaire, a man moved by no overriding conviction of any kind. He was what he was not for any belief in himself, but for lack of it. He is a patron neither of the positive thinker, nor of the "man of principle," nor of the nonconformist. He was only a weak, rather conventionally minded Israelite caught up by the grace of God and, by his faith, given the strength and the imperative to do what his every natural fibre prompted him not to do. Thus did prophecy reveal itself in a life.

3. JEREMIAH AND THE REFORM

It has always caused some remark that so few of Jeremiah's prophecies can be assigned to the time of Josiah, though the accepted chronology of his life would have him active for nearly twenty years during that king's reign. Some have also found it significant that in his pursuit of reform the king consulted not Jeremiah, but the otherwise unknown prophetess Huldah (2 Kgs 22,14), despite the fact that Jeremiah was already a prophet of some five years' standing in Jerusalem. A few authors have come to the conclusion that the chronological data in the Book of Jeremiah are incorrect, and that the prophet's career did not actually begin until the time of the fall of Assyria. Others find in his silence the ominous sign of a total disapproval of Josiah and his labor for the cult of Yahweh.

Neither conclusion seems to be necessary. What is more likely is that Jeremiah supported Josiah's reform in principle, even though he was not one of its prime movers. The passage in 11,1–14 is the object of considerable debate among interpreters. For some, "the words of this covenant" that occurs in the passage more than once refers to the Deuteronomic covenant entered into by the people of Judah at Josiah's insistence (2 Kgs 23,1–3). I do not believe the reference can be made quite so precise: the covenant to which Jeremiah points is rather that of Sinai, the great covenant that had constituted Israel. But in speaking of a written law that depended on this covenant, he certainly included—in the context of the Josian age he could hardly have excluded it—the lawcode of Deuteronomy that was the basis of Josiah's reform. I would agree, therefore, that he spoke these words probably in support of the reform. It is true, the whole passage belongs to the "Deuteronomic" portion of Jeremiah, which means that it has doubtless been put into its present form by others than the prophet. But there is no reason to reject the substance of the statement as essentially Jeremiah's.

Suggestive in this connection is the episode to which I alluded above, 11,18–12,6, in which the prophet complains of a threat to his life from his own people at Anathoth. The biblical text never clarifies the motivation of this plot; however, one quite plausible explanation would be the support that Jeremiah presumably gave to Josiah. Anathoth, Jeremiah's native village about three miles northeast of Jerusalem, was the place to which Solomon had exiled the priest Abiathar (1 Kgs 2,26 f.). Since Jer 1,1 identifies Jeremiah as one of the priests of Anathoth, it is very probable that he and his relatives all belonged to this same priestly family of Abiathar. Now this family, together with all others that were not of the Zadokite Jerusalem priesthood, was dispossessed of its priestly functions and livelihood as a by-product of the Josian enactment of the Deuteronomic legislation. If Jeremiah had supported this reform, by his own family he might very well have been hated as a traitor to its best interests.

Also, if Josiah's efforts enjoyed Jeremiah's sympathies, we can the more readily explain why such a relatively few of the prophet's oracles derive from this period. Since Jeremiah's function was mainly condemnatory, there could have been little need for prophecy of his kind when, at long last, a Yahwistic reformation was being implemented with all the sanction of royal authority.

On the other hand, however, it seems to be even more certain that Jeremiah's enthusiasm for the reform later cooled considerably, if it did not vanish altogether. Perhaps it is less correct to say that he lost faith in the reform than that he lost patience with its processes. In 3,10, in the midst of an excoriation of the northern and southern kingdoms, he charges Judah with crimes worse than those of Israel, for Judah's crowning insult to the Lord has been to return to him "in deceit." This has been widely interpreted as an allusion to the Josian reform, and probably rightly. The reform had begun well, but it had gone neither far nor deeply enough. Worse, it had been sidetracked into superficiality. We can see from Jeremiah's temple sermon in 7,1–15, delivered shortly after Josiah's death early in the reign of Jehoiakim (26,2 provides the

setting for the sermon), that for many Judahites of Josiah's time the temple of Jerusalem itself had become the illusory symbol of a purely automatic guarantee of divine protection. Without feeling any need of personal reform, they thought that their external consecration to Yahweh in the renovated temple had made them sure of his favor. "We have the temple of Yahweh!" they cried, and believed that they needed nothing more. The reform, by concentrating its attention on the purity of the temple rites, could encourage the complacency of such Israelites.

Once again, therefore, man's ancient proclivity to confuse correct behavior with right living had been the principal beneficiary of the best efforts of a truly pious and well-intentioned king. Forms, of course, are a necessity for man, who is as much a man in his senses as he is in his heart and his head. But it was obviously easier to change liturgical law than to control the spirit which the liturgy was intended to express. It was far easier to ensure the scrupulous performance of a certain pattern of external conduct than to make that conduct mean anything in terms of inner conviction. Many a reformer and many a leader of men has had to face this same embarrassment, glum and disconcerting though it be, that the enthusiasm with which he had fired his followers has burnt itself out on trifles, that very often what he attacked or built up only as a symptom or a symbol has become for them the end-all and be-all of his movement. Exactly this took place in the later Judaism when for some Jews the letter of the Mosaic Law became the whole of righteousness itself rather than the means of practising it.

It is in this context of disillusionment with the Josian reform that Jeremiah's temple sermon makes the best sense. Probably in the same way we should understand his reference to the Ark of the Covenant in 3,16, a prophecy with which he presumably supplemented the theme of Judah's "deceitful conversion" after the Chaldeans had sacked the temple. The restored Israel, he prophesies, will no longer have an Ark. Just as John saw no temple in his vision of the heavenly Jerusalem (Ap 21,22), neither would

the new Israel, Jeremiah hoped, have need of the material forms that had proved to be obstacles in its way toward God rather than the guideposts they were intended to be.

This, I believe, does justice to Jeremiah's authentic thinking on the reform. Some authors have also pointed to his words on the subject of Yahweh's law:

> How can you say, "We are wise;
> we have the law of Yahweh"?
> Nay, behold, the lying pen of the scribes
> has made it into a lie (8,8).

This pronouncement means, they would claim, that Jeremiah repudiated the lawcode of Deuteronomy itself as a falsification of Yahweh's will.

It seems to me obvious that this is to go much too far. Here Jeremiah is merely continuing the prophetic tradition of condemning the people's religious leaders for their dereliction of duty and their profanation of the law that they were committed by office to teach. He rejects no law of Yahweh, but what its interpreters, the scribes, had made of the law. In later Judaism the professional student and expounder of the law, the rabbi, was called the "scribe," by the same association of ideas that eventually made of the medieval "clerk" any man who could read and write. In this pre-exilic text the term does not yet have so technical a determination. Jeremiah is thinking especially of the priesthood which had been entrusted with the tradition of the *torah*, and which by connivance with evil men, by ignorance of its duties and responsibilities, and by active malice had ended by falsifying the mind and will of God.

We have every reason, therefore, to think of Jeremiah's activity during Josiah's time as directed to the best interests of the reform, whatever his reservations about certain aspects of it.

The prophecies collected in 2,1–3,5 probably represent some

of Jeremiah's oldest work, though they give evidence of having been brought up to date later on when the prophet gave them a final edition. These verses are closely dependent both on Hosea and on the lawcode of Deuteronomy: 3,1 makes reference to the law of Dt 24,1–4 forbidding a man to remarry with the wife whom he has repudiated. The prophecies attack not only Judah but also the Israel of the north, that is, the Israelites who had survived the Assyrian conquest of the north, doubtless the bulk of the population. Here and in other prophecies of this same period Jeremiah appears at times to take explicit note of the reformation that was in progress. In 3,23 f., for example, he deplores the "hills of deceit" that have drawn the people away from Yahweh and delivered them up to "the Shame"—the local "high places," in other words, where the worship of Yahweh had been confused with that of Baal, which were eradicated by the Deuteronomic reform.

In 1,11–14, a prophecy that has been connected with Jeremiah's inaugural vision in our text of his book, occurs his first prediction of destruction "from the north," continuing a message of punishment by invasion first announced for Judah by Isaiah and Micah, and already fulfilled in Israel as predicted by Amos and Hosea. "The north" probably meant to Jeremiah nothing more than the direction from which invasion was normally to be expected in Palestine (so also in 4,5 ff.). If he had been asked, in this early period, who the invader would be, he would almost certainly have replied that it would be Assyria. Later on, he was able to specify that it would be the Chaldeans who would come.

One of these early passages perhaps adds a new note to the tradition that it continues:

> Roam through the streets of Jerusalem,
> see and discover,
> search in its public places,
> if you can find a man,
> if there is anyone who does right,
> who strives for fidelity;

—then I shall spare it!
Though they say, "As Yahweh lives!,"
yet they swear falsely.
Yahweh, do not your eyes look for fidelity?
You have struck them,
but they felt it not;
you have ruined them,
they refused to take the lesson.
They have made their faces harder than stone,
they have refused to return.
I said, "Yes, but these are the lowly,
they are foolish;
for they know not Yahweh's way,
the right demanded by their God.
Let me go to the great ones,
let me speak with them;
for they know Yahweh's way,
the right demanded by their God."
Yes, but it is they, they who have shattered the yoke,
they have broken the bonds (5,1–5).

We are reminded somewhat of Zephaniah's moralizing of "the humble." These terms, too, "lowly" and "great," are economic in their origin. Jeremiah reveals here the real misery of the poor: underprivileged in all else, their moral deprivation had now become a commonplace, a poverty simply to be assumed. The prophet does assume it, not in anger, nor yet in extenuation, but as one of the sad realities of his unhappy land. Here he is not defending the poor, but including rich and poor alike in the sweep of his judgment of a society that has gone bad clean through. And therein, of course, lay the full significance of what he was saying. The wealthy, the powerful, the men of substance whose lives were not filled with the monotony of wresting a thin subsistence from the inhospitable clay where circumstance and the acts of man had

set them—it was precisely these, without a shadow of excuse, who had abandoned the law of God and of life.

Of course Jeremiah does nothing new in impeaching the perfidy of the rich and powerful; here he is on completely familiar prophetic ground. What is new is the implied consequence that Jeremiah is willing to draw from the comparison he has set up. That he makes the comparison is, in fact, the significant thing. He has seen not merely that evil men have acquired wealth evilly, as the other prophets did, but that men can become evil despite their wealth, that wealth can be an irrelevancy in the dialogue of good and evil.

In the this-worldly moral view of the Old Testament, the idea died hard that material prosperity—not necessarily great riches, but at least a comfortable, good life—was as much the mark of a good man devoted to God as temporal failure was the mark of the transgressor. We should hardly be surprised at this, as it is an idea often just as firmly held among Christians, in practice if not in theory. It is an idea that battles for survival in the Book of Job, throughout the Psalms, and in the Wisdom writings. It finally succumbs to a superior logic of experience, and Jeremiah's was part of this experience. Beyond this, the Old Testament could not go. Poverty never became for it a virtue or an ideal. Of Jeremiah, however, we can say what another author has said of the writer of Ecclesiastes, that "he never arrived at the threshold of the Gospel. Nevertheless, before anyone would be able to understand 'Blessed are the poor,' it had to be recognized first that 'Blessed are the rich' was wrong."[2] This Jeremiah did recognize.

Further on, Jeremiah speaks of the wealthy Jerusalemite men of affairs in familiar prophetic language:

> For evil men are found among my people;
> like crouching fowlers they lie in wait;
> they spread their nets to catch men.

[2] R. Pautrel, S.J., *L'Ecclésiaste* (La Sainte Bible de Jérusalem; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, ²1953), p. 13.

As the cage is filled with birds,
so their houses are filled with deceit;
thus they have become great and rich.
They have abandoned my words for evil;
the cause of the orphan they have not vindicated;
they have not judged rightly for the poor (5,26–28).

Here and in c. 6, where Jeremiah vividly pictures the coming invasion of Judah, he was obviously striving for true and essential reformation. There was certainly no inconsistency on his part, therefore, if he later criticized the efforts sponsored by Josiah for their superficiality. Many of those whom he describes were like the Israelites of Bethel and Samaria, who could only be the worse for being allowed to affect interest in liturgical reform when their need was to restore social justice. Jeremiah's temple sermon, therefore, resulted from no change in his pace. It was only that the lesser spirits of Judah had been unable to keep step with his pace.

Thus says Yahweh Sebaoth, the God of Israel: "Make good your ways and your works, that I may dwell with you in this place. Trust not in words of deceit, saying, 'Here is Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple!' But if you really make good your ways and your works, if you really do right by one another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, and do not follow after other gods to your own harm, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I have given to your fathers for all time" (7,3–7).

This sermon comes to us in the never highly inspired prose of a Deuteronomist editor and lacks the passion of Amos' speech at Bethel. As we shall soon see, however, it took fully as much if not more courage for Jeremiah to deliver such a sermon as this in the first days of Jehoiakim. It is a moral catechism read to pre-

sumptuous men who come before Yahweh like Gentiles who confidently go through the automatic motions of a magic rite. Jeremiah lays down the real terms for Yahweh's continued presence among his people. He is not summoned, nor does he remain, at the mere pretence of a name; he is the God of those whose works proclaim him their God. Such are they who deal mercifully with their fellows. Such are they, the prophet continues, who have not denied their calling by thievery, murder, adultery, lying, and idolatry (v. 9). When the temple is frequented by those whose deeds mark them as true Israelites, then it is truly a holy dwelling place where God meets his people. Otherwise, it is rather what Christ would later call it, a den of thieves, a resort of the ungodly (v. 11). And because it has become this, it is a useless, idle building that will be swept away, just as long ago, for Israel's sins, Yahweh discarded his sanctuary at Shiloh (vv. 12–14).[3]

We shall take one final, somewhat lengthy passage from Jeremiah's indictment of Judah, which again belongs to the early days of Jehoiakim. Seemingly, this prophecy begins with the prophet's own meditation on the state of his people, in a manner characteristic of Jeremiah, who so often mingles his personal reactions—and often vehement reactions—with his prophetic message.

Who will give me a wayfarers' inn in the desert?
I would leave my people and go far from them.
For all of them are adulterers,
a band of rebels.
They have bent their tongues like bows;
deceit and no fidelity prevails in the land;
for they proceed from evil to evil,
and Yahweh they know not.

[3] Shiloh, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem, was the site of the chief Israelite sanctuary from the time of Joshua to Samuel (the period of the Judges). Its destruction is elsewhere presumed in the Scripture, but only here stated in so many words. It was probably destroyed by the Philistines in their victorious campaign against Israel described in 1 Sm 4,1–7,2.

Distrust your friends, every one of you,
and trust not in any brother!
For every brother overreaches the other,
and every friend goes forth a slanderer.
Every man deceives the other,
and truth they speak not;
they teach their tongues to speak deceit,
they commit iniquity and are tireless at it.
With violence on violence, fraud upon fraud,
they refuse to know Yahweh.
Therefore, thus says Yahweh Sebaoth:
"Behold, I shall smelt them and test them,
for what else can I do in the face of my people?
Their tongues are murderous arrows,
fraud is the speech of their mouths.
'Peace!' a man says to his friend,
and secretly he lays a snare for him.
Shall I not visit on them all these things?—oracle of Yahweh—
Shall my soul not be avenged of such a people as this?
On the mountains raise tears and wailings,
and on the pastures of the desert lamentations;
for they are burnt, and no one shall cross them,
they shall no more hear the sound of the flocks;
both the birds of the heavens and the beasts,
all have disappeared, gone.
And I shall make of Jerusalem rubble,
a dwelling for jackals;
and the cities of Judah I shall make a solitude,
without inhabitant!" (9,1–10).

Jeremiah uses Hosea's word, "rebels," to describe the apostasy of Judah. This term is the key to the meaning of the parallel "adulterers": the people's crime is not simply the disruption of individual family ties, but a shattering of the sacred marriage bond

that united people and God. The passage contains many other reminiscences of Hosea's thought. It depicts as well as it has ever been depicted what happens to a people that has lost its ethos, that is no longer capable of explaining itself. When national purpose has been lost, the nation itself must slowly rot away. From a detached point of view, the divine decree of ruin and obliteration for such a people was as much an act of mercy as of wrath and retribution.

4. JEREMIAH AND JEHOIAKIM

Jeremiah yields to none of the other prophets in the amount of obloquy he has heaped on the heads of the rulers of his land. By Yahweh's express command he was sent to prophesy against "kings, princes, priests, and people" (1,18), and no one reading his oracles can accuse him of slacking this duty; cc. 21–24 of his book are devoted entirely to the kings, princes, false prophets, and other leaders who had betrayed both Judah and Yahweh.

There is an obvious explanation of this emphasis. No other prophet before him had had to endure quite the amount of obstruction he encountered from the high and mighty in the land. Bad kings were certainly nothing new, in Israel or in Judah, but it was something new for a king to rule with the naked absolutism that Jehoiakim affected. Elijah in Ahab, Amos in Jeroboam II, Isaiah in Ahaz, all had confronted tyrants, but none of these had found himself in so much personal danger from his prophecy as Jeremiah now did. In Jer 26, 18 f., as a matter of fact, we are told in so many words that the jeopardy to which Jeremiah had exposed himself would have been unheard of in former days, when the prophet's person had been sacred. In Judah's declining, degenerate days, with the decay of so much else that had made up the Israel of old, the religious awe that had surrounded the prophet with a shield of protection was also fast disappearing.

The episode in which we learn of this new vulnerability of the prophet is the earliest in the history of Jeremiah's struggle for his

life against the royal tyranny. Actually, Jehoiakim himself does not feature in this account, but the presage of what he was to be appears in the arrogant attitude adopted by the temple officials. On this occasion Jeremiah was saved by the judgment of the royal magistrates, at the plea of some of the rural aristocracy then present at the temple ceremonies. These "elders of the land" who defended him were possibly from the homeland of Micah, the prophet whose example they cited from the past. Some of the spirit of Josiah still endured, and Jeremiah was delivered; but that the question of his freedom to speak should have arisen at all was indicative of what was to come. The priests and temple prophets who were seeking his life were all Jehoiakim's creatures. Baruch appends the story of another prophet who in conditions similar to Jeremiah's was hunted down and slain by the king (26,20–24). We also discover here that Jeremiah's good fortune was in part to be laid to his having friends in high places. Ahikam ben Shaphan, who befriended him, was one of Josiah's officials (2 Kgs 22,12), and the father of the Gedeliah who governed Judah briefly after the Babylonian conquest.

The next round in Jeremiah's battle with the king's henchmen is to be seen in the passage 19,1–20,6. As it stands in our Book of Jeremiah, the account has an artificial continuity, the editorial combination of several episodes in Jeremiah's life that occurred at different times. The first of these is Jeremiah's own description of a prophecy in act or symbolic action, his smashing an earthen pot to signify the Lord's coming destruction of Judah (19,1–2a.10–11a). This prophecy, similar in meaning and in content to Jeremiah's meditation over the potter at work (18,1–12), might belong to practically any period of his career. Within it has been inserted one of his sermons against Topheth in the valley of Ben-hinnom, the place where human sacrifice, revived by Jehoiakim, had been offered since the time of Ahaz (19,2b–9). This sermon is evidently from a somewhat later time than the remainder of this section, which, with the exception of a few transitional verses to tie the episodes together, is the story of Jeremiah's prophecy against

Jerusalem which he delivered in the temple court and which, this time, brought down physical violence on his head.

This prophecy was given sometime after Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Neco in 605. In 20,4 Jeremiah for the first time names Babylon as the place of Judah's predicted exile.

The contemptuous treatment accorded Jeremiah at the hands of Pashhur, chief of the temple police, reveals how much the climate had already changed. This little bureaucrat had no mind or disposition of his own, and he would never have dared deal so summarily with the prophet had he not been very sure of the backing of his superiors. It was with a consummate flair for the dramatic that Jeremiah's editor appended to this story 20,7–18, the last part of Jeremiah's "Confessions." Incidents such as the one just described provoked these inspired outbursts of the prophet.

The last datable episode in this history is the famous one of c. 36, one of the best examples of good reporting found in the Bible, which should be read straight through for its vivid story. Jeremiah was by this time, of course, a well-known prophet, and the general drift of his message was common knowledge. But now, with all of his condemnatory oracles—some of them already fulfilled—gathered on one scroll, their cumulative effect when read from Gemariah's room to the people standing in the court, and later to the royal officials, was completely overwhelming. It was an experience calculated to move almost any conscience but Jehoiakim's. The officials, knowing their master's character all too well, did the only prudent thing in advising Jeremiah and Baruch to go into hiding before the scroll was read to the king.

The spectacle of the arrogant little princeling cutting Jeremiah's prophecies to ribbons and burning them bit by bit over his brazier surely has its equals elsewhere in the chronicles of porcine statecraft, but just as surely it has never been surpassed in them. Time had already run out for Jehoiakim. Loathed by his own people, he owed all that he was to Neco, and Neco had now been routed by Nebuchadnezzar, who was on the borders of Judah. Soon he

would be making an abject obeisance to the Chaldeans only to save his skin. His only chance, no longer for greatness but for a kinder memory, was to take refuge in the covenant which Yahweh had sworn with his fathers. How much he was disposed to do this, our story tells us very well.

Thus far the context of Jeremiah's prophecies against Jehoiakim. It is a fragmentary record, one that leaves as much to the imagination as it explains, but it is adequate in the essentials. It is interesting to observe that, whatever his provocation, Jeremiah never sought an answer to Judah's problems in any political change. He accepted without question that society was divided by nature between governors and the governed. The king remained for him always the anointed of Yahweh, and though none might denounce his transgressions more bitterly than Jeremiah, he never dreamt that any other could be appointed to rule. Redress, when it would come through the divine intervention, would be the work of a messianic king of the same Davidic line. In all of this, Jeremiah's thought is quite Isaian. However, he has also breathed more freely of the spirit of Deuteronomy and of Elijah and Hosea in his more "democratic" approach to the king. Like every other member of the Yahwistic community, the king has a role carefully defined according to rules that he must observe and for which he can be called to account (cf. Dt 17,14–20).

In 21,11–23,8 Jeremiah's editor has gathered together his major oracles relating to the Judahite kings and has inserted them into the history of the prophet's dealings with Zedekiah. The bulk of these prophecies, however, concerns Jehoiakim either directly or indirectly. In these oracles we discern best of all, by antithesis, how Jeremiah looked on the kingship.

The introductory verses, 21,11–22,9, on the kingship in general, certainly have Jehoiakim in mind and derive from his time. The prophet's judgment on the banished Jehoahaz (22,10–12) is noncommittal; he simply predicts that that unfortunate king will never return, and suggests by implication that hopes of a restoration are

illusory and had better be bent toward more realistic goals. The verses that immediately follow contain his most direct assault on Jehoiakim:

"Woe to him who builds his house with no-righteousness,
and its chambers with no-right;
who makes his neighbor slave for nothing,
and gives him no return for his labor;
who says, 'I shall build me a great house,
with vast chambers,
laid open with windows,
overlaid with cedar,
and decorated with vermilion.'
Do you think thus to play the king,
contesting with cedar?
Your father, did he not eat and drink?
But he also practised right and righteousness.
He judged the case of the needy and the poor;
then all went well for him.
Is not this to know me?—the oracle of Yahweh.
But your eyes and heart are fixed on nothing,
save only on plunder for yourself,
and on spilling innocent blood,
and on oppressing and extorting" (22,13–17).

If Jeremiah's leathern scroll was filled with many lines like these, it is not hard to understand why the king cut it to shreds. There is a great deal suggested in this passage that we do not learn about in Baruch's brief history of Jeremiah's relations to Jehoiakim. The prophet denounces Jehoiakim's housebuilding for the same reason that Amos called down woe on the luxurious palaces of Samaria, because of the social injustices that had made them possible. Of the details of Jehoiakim's oppression, however, we have no fur-

ther information.[4] There is fine irony in Jeremiah's taunt: has Jehoiakim no other notion of what it means to be a king, except to outstrip others in building projects? If he would see the image of a real Israelite king, he has it in the example of his father Josiah before him.

Joined to this oracle is Jeremiah's best-known prediction of the circumstances of Jehoiakim's death:

They shall not mourn for him:
"Alas, my brother! alas, sister!"
They shall not mourn for him:
"Alas, the lord! alas, his majesty!"
With the burial of an ass he shall be buried,
dragged out and cast outside the gates of Jerusalem (22,18 f.).

The "burial of an ass" is no burial at all, simply the casting out of refuse. The same prophecy is quoted of Jeremiah in 36,30: "He shall have no heir to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out for the heat by day and the frost by night." It seems plain enough that Jeremiah expected no burial of any kind for Jehoiakim. According to 2 Kgs 24,6, nevertheless, Jehoiakim was buried in the royal cemetery of Jerusalem—at least, this would be our normal understanding of the statement that is made there. This statement may be purely conventional, the standard conclusion of the summary of a king's career in Kings. Or we may think, alternatively, that the spirit rather than the letter of Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Jehoiakim's death; for the king died in universal detestation amid the chaos created by his stupidity and malice, and only the Semitic reluctance to desecrate the dead might have prevented his body from being discarded as offal. At any rate, the prophecies of Jeremiah were edited long after Jehoiakim's

[4] Hb 2,17, in the interpretation offered above, would refer to the same thing. To Jehoiakim's disgruntled subjects, "cedar" and "Lebanon" might have been words as charged and evocative as "tea" was to Bostonians in 1773.

death, the circumstances of which were well known, and obviously the editor found no incongruity between prophecy and event.

Scattered through the Book of Jeremiah are condemnations also of those who were associated with Jehoiakim in his evil sway over Judah. Chief among these were the "prophets of peace," the false prophets who promised only good things with no conditions attached, with whom Jeremiah was brought into conflict perhaps more than any other true prophet of the Lord. In c. 28 there is the beautifully narrated story of Jeremiah's encounter with one of these, Hananiah ben Azzur, during the initial phases of the Babylonian conquest. This and the two surrounding chapters, as a matter of fact, appear to have been once an independent work, a sort of Jeremianic dossier on the prophets of peace. In 23,9–40 there is another collection of oracles against them and the priests who had strengthened the hands of evildoers by lending false counsels of security. Rarely, of course, can a single man, and certainly not such an unsympathetic one as Jehoiakim, prevail over the united will of a people; he must have help, much help. To make Jehoiakim possible, Judah's history had remained consistent to the end; priests had withheld the knowledge of Yahweh's law, its rulers were rebels, and its prophets had revealed not the moral God of Israel but, equivalently, the Canaanite Baal (cf. 2,8).

As it happened with Isaiah, the evil state of the monarchy served as the incentive to develop Jeremiah's messianic thinking. Since Yahweh had promised that the Davidic dynasty would be forever for his people, it followed that there must eventually arise a Davidic king who would rule after Yahweh's heart. Fittingly enough, Jeremiah's editor has inserted his messianic teaching within the enclosure of these oracles framed against the criminal leadership that had brought God's people to ruin. The following passage comes from the time of Zedekiah rather than of Jehoiakim, however. Yahweh contrasts himself, the Good Shepherd, with the evil shepherds who have scattered his flock; whereupon the text continues:

"Behold, the days come—oracle of Yahweh—
when I shall raise up for David a righteous shoot.
He shall rule as a king and reign wisely,
he shall enact right and righteousness in the land.
In his days Judah will be saved,
and Israel will dwell in security.
And by this name will they call him:
'Yahweh-is-our-righteousness!' " (23,5 f.).

Jeremiah speaks of the just king to come as a new "shoot" for David; the idea is the same as that of Is 11,1. He does not hesitate, whereas Isaiah did, to use the title "king," for he has a purpose in doing so. Jehoiakim had been an evil king, and Zedekiah was less than a king, but this will be a true king, performing the proper function of a king, which is to vindicate Yahweh's right and righteousness. As Isaiah did in his final messianic oracle, Jeremiah puts his coming in the indefinite future. Also as Isaiah did, he attributes to the king a wonderful name: in him will be revealed the righteousness of the Lord.

This is Jeremiah's sole reference to a messianic scion of David which will be generally admitted as authentically the prophet's (other references are in 30,9 and 33,14 ff.). However, it is beyond question that in Jeremiah the messianic expectation continued unabated along the lines that had been previously drawn for it.

5. JEREMIAH AND ZEDEKIAH

In the verses we have just seen, the name of the messianic king is given as "Yahweh-is-our-righteousness!," in Hebrew *Yahweh-sidqénu.* Jeremiah is evidently playing on the sound and meaning of the name of Zedekiah: in Hebrew, *sidqi-yahu* (Yahu is a shorter form of Yahweh). Zedekiah's name proclaimed him—and how falsely!—to be the righteousness of Yahweh, but this the messianic

king will be in reality, just as he will be in reality all else that the kings of Judah were meant to be and had not been.

At first it may come as a surprise that Jeremiah seems to have had less use for Zedekiah than for Jehoiakim, though there is no doubt that Jehoiakim was by far the worse of the two men. It may be equally surprising that Jeremiah should have suffered more from Zedekiah than from Jehoiakim, despite the fact that Zedekiah was personally disposed to admire the prophet whereas Jehoiakim had despised him. As I have indicated above, Zedekiah appears not to have been really an evil man, he was only an incredibly obtuse one. Jeremiah's experience may help substantiate the opinion that in the long run greater harm can be caused through stupidity than by naked malice. With the latter the man of serious purpose can cope as one of the foreseen hazards of the game. But folly is harebrained and unpredictable.

At any rate, it is because of Jeremiah that we know so much about the character of this last Davidic king. Zedekiah's being what he was helped the more to etherealize Jeremiah's hopes for the messianic king: certainly he did not look for him in any of Zedekiah's immediate descendants. Neither did he count on a return of the ephemeral Jehoiachin. His words in 22,24–30 were uttered to dispel the lingering hopes of such a restoration exemplified in the prophecy of Hananiah in 28,4. There are some archeological data that have been interpreted to mean that the Chaldeans, at least provisionally, had contemplated the return of Jehoiachin to the throne. Ezekiel's practice of dating his prophecies according to the year of Judah's exile (which would also have been the corresponding year of Jehoiachin's reign, had he been king) has likewise been taken as evidence of the confidence of many Judahites that Jehoiachin would yet rule over his inheritance in Palestine. Jeremiah, however, prophesied that he would die in Babylon with no heir to succeed to the throne of David, and Jeremiah was right.

With both Jehoiachin and Zedekiah removed from serious consideration, Jeremiah was encouraged to look for the consolation of Israel in the farther future. In the vision of the two baskets of

figs (c. 24) it was revealed to him that Israel's hope for restoration lay in the process of the exile, not in the miserable excuse for a government which Zedekiah maintained in Palestine; already in Jehoiakim's time he had predicted an exile of "seventy years" (25,11 f.), that is, of an indefinite period that would outlast at least the present generation. Finally, in his letter to the exiles (c. 29), the prophet advised them to abandon hope of a speedy restoration and to settle down to life in Babylonia, there to await the Israel of the future.

The record of Jeremiah's conflicts with Zedekiah begins with c. 27. The title of this chapter in our text of the book puts the events in Jehoiakim's reign, but we quickly discover that this is inaccurate; the correct indication appears at the beginning of c. 28, when it becomes clear that we are in Zedekiah's fourth year, that is, 594. Zedekiah was at the time entertaining foreign ambassadors for the purpose of planning a revolt against Babylon. These two chapters relate Jeremiah's opposition to this hopeless alliance and his controversy with the false prophets who favored it. As a result of his letter to the exiles, these prophets tried to get him imprisoned (29,24–32), but were as yet unsuccessful.

Jeremiah's counsel went unheeded, and the next we see of his dealings with the ineffectual king is in 21,1–10, when Jerusalem was under the siege of the Chaldeans. This places us in the year 588, the tenth of Zedekiah. Here the king asks his rejected prophet for an oracle, hoping that Jeremiah will now prophesy peace. Jeremiah, however, has no hope to offer, and no vain, inefficacious hope to humor. Appropriately, the Babylonian siege is to remain the backdrop for the rest of his association with Zedekiah.

One of the most enlightening stories in the Book of Jeremiah for the revelation it gives of Zedekiah's character, and that of all Jerusalem as well, is in c. 34. From it we learn that Zedekiah himself, apparently, had obtained from the officials and other householders of Jerusalem a solemn covenant made with Yahweh (v. 18 f.), that all male and female Hebrew slaves were to be set free, that no one should hold his fellow Judahite in slavery (v. 9). This measure,

adopted during the Babylonian siege, was evidently calculated to attract the divine favor and, doubtless, to provide additional defenders for the city. But once the siege had been momentarily lifted (v. 21), the covenanters repented themselves of their good deed and quickly reduced their brethren to slavery once more (v. 11). The story, and Jeremiah's prophecy that it contains, offer as caustic a commentary as has ever been made on social decadence and moribundity.

The reason for the temporary stay of the siege is explained in 37,1–10: the advance of Pharaoh Hophra from Egypt, apparently to give Judah aid against the Chaldeans. Jeremiah prophesied, again correctly, that Hophra would withdraw, and then the siege would recommence. But again he had no one to hear him, and in the exultation of the moment the Jerusalemites heartlessly returned to the wrongdoing they had abandoned so transiently and with such little conviction.

Hebrew slaves were chiefly debt-slaves of the type mentioned in 2 Kgs 4,1; the law governing them is cited in Jer 34,12–14 according to Dt 15,12. This law provided that the time of servitude for such a slave should not exceed six years, but the text of Jeremiah makes it clear that the law had long gone unobserved in Israel. From this passage we can surmise much about the conditions of Jeremiah's time, especially as regards the network of the oppression of the poor with which the prophets from Amos on have charged the legislators and judicial authorities of Israel. Failure to enforce the ancient religious law was surely one of the prime causes of social injustice. Not only had the slave's right to his freedom been denied him—and according to the Deuteronomic law he was entitled on his release to a sufficiency of his master's goods to permit him to begin independent existence on fair terms—but that these slaves tardily freed could so casually be brought back into servitude testifies to further collusion between civil authority and greedy owners to the shameful disregard of the rights of free men, or to an economic order become so much the tool of the wealthy that the

slightest pressure could force any given number of the poor into "voluntary" slavery as the price of their survival.

So it was, with the death knell already sounding for whoever would hear it in Judah, with all of Judah's strongholds fallen to the Chaldeans save only Lachish and Azekah to the south (34,7), and these under constant siege to prevent relief from Egypt, yet Jerusalem turned a deaf and contemptuous ear to its last call to repentance, and its king was powerless, or unwilling, to do anything about it.

During this momentary intermission in the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah underwent his first imprisonment under Zedekiah, first in the house of Jonathan the scribe, then in the quarters of the city guard. When we read the account of the imprisonment and its circumstances in 37,11–21, we are apt to recognize something vaguely familiar about the suspicion of the guard Irijah that Jeremiah was a traitor seeking to join forces with the Chaldeans. Irijah possessed the single-minded discipline necessary to the military or to a police state, which cannot bother its head over motives and scruples and which sees sin only in deviation and divisiveness. What is perhaps most interesting of all the details in the story, however, is the action of Zedekiah, the prisoner of his own ministers, who consults Jeremiah as far as he dares and, in fact, does the best he can for him by removing him from the untender attentions of Jonathan. It must be admitted, too, that Jeremiah's responses to the king and his officials were hardly inspired by any desire to placate the prophet's opponents.

While Jeremiah was in the quarters of the guard, the event occurred that is described in c. 32, together with the further prophecies of c. 33. These illustrate an aspect of the prophet's character that we should be careful not to overlook.

I have commented several times on the persuasion of certain authors, no longer much in vogue, that the prophets were moved by a kind of "nomadic ideal": Israel's nomadic background had created a tradition of "the equality of the desert" which finds an expression in the prophets' social teaching. Jeremiah, too, has been conceived

as one who harked back to this nomadic ideal, on the basis of such passages, perhaps, as this:

> "I remember the loyalty of your youth,
> your love at betrothal,
> when you followed me about in the desert,
> in the uncultivated land.
> Israel was holy unto Yahweh,
> the firstfruits of his harvest;
> who ate of her had to atone,
> evil fell upon them" (2,2 f.).

Now it is true that in citing this oracle of the Lord the prophet acknowledges the historical fact that Israel had in its earlier days more closely approximated the ideal set for it, striving for that holiness for which Yahweh had later looked in vain. But obviously his accent is not on the nomadic character of the society that then was, but on Israel's youth, before it had learnt evil ways. Similarly in 7,22 f., where Yahweh contrasts the unworthy sacrifices of the present Judah with its former spiritual religion, "the day I brought them forth from the land of Egypt" simply defines statistically when his law was first delivered to Israel.

Somewhat more ambiguous, perhaps, is the account of Jeremiah's meeting with the Rechabites who had taken refuge in Jerusalem during the first Babylonian siege in Jehoiakim's time (c. 35): another chapter that should be read straight through as an example of good storytelling. The Rechabites were a reactionary element not without parallels in some modern Arab societies; they had refused to adapt themselves to a sedentary life, holding that it was incompatible with the observance of the law of Yahweh. Every religion in history has experienced movements of this kind, "plain people" who have clung stubbornly to the economic conditions of their origins, convinced that these alone afford a climate for religious purity, or those who, for the same reasons, try to make a deliberate

return to the supposedly simpler ways of the past. Religion was probably only a partial explanation of the Rechabites; the other part was doubtless the contempt felt by the Bedawin for the town Arab, whose security is bought at the dreadful price of sacrificing the unrestricted independence of the desert. It is the religious motivation of the Rechabites that is in question in Jer 35, however.

This story is a parable in life, in which the prophet puts the Rechabites to the test and finds their conduct true to their convictions. He is evidently warm in his admiration for them, and holds them up to Judah as an example to condemn its faithlessness. But in any parable it is important to see the term of comparison. The Rechabites are not praised for their affection for the nomadic life, but for clinging to it out of a stern sense of duty. Even if this sense of duty was misdirected, it was no less admirable, and that is the point of the parable. Jeremiah could with all propriety use the Rechabites' devotion to their ideal to shame a people that had lost its ideals. There is no hint that he agreed with the Rechabites, only that he applauded their consistency. In the same way, Christians traveling in the modern Near East have often been edified by Muslim fidelity to the fast of Ramadan without being the least attracted by the religion that is its motive.

The story told in c. 32 makes it very clear where Jeremiah stood in all this. During the siege in Zedekiah's tenth year, with Jeremiah still in prison, the prophet's cousin Hanameel ben Shallum called on him as next of kin to fulfil the duty of "redemption," according to the law of Lv 25,25. Jeremiah recognized in this request the inspiration of Yahweh. Worthy of note is the care with which he had the legal forms observed to ensure the validity of the deed and its matter of public record (vv. 10–15), for such was Yahweh's will:

> Thus says Yahweh Sebaoth, the God of Israel: "They will buy houses and fields and vineyards once more in this land."

The point of the story is not simply that Jeremiah believed

Yahweh would restore Judah. What Jeremiah did, typically and by anticipation, was actually to restore Judah, acting in Yahweh's name, in terms that had meaning for him. The law of land redemption was premised on the traditional Semitic conviction that ownership was a family affair and that land should not be alienated to encourage monopoly but should be kept within the family, the unit of society, as the condition of economic security. In the observance of such orderly processes of a settled people the restoration of Israel that was Yahweh's will and promise was inevitably conceived by the traditionalist Israelite that was Jeremiah.

> Thus says Yahweh: "Just as I have brought upon this people all this great evil, so I shall bring upon them all the good that I pronounce upon them. Fields shall be bought in this land of which you say, 'It is a desolation, without man or beast, delivered into the hands of the Chaldeans.' They will buy fields for money and write out the deed, and seal it, and call witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the environs of Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, the cities of the mountain country, the cities of the Shephelah, and the cities of the Negeb; for I shall bring back their return"—the oracle of Yahweh (vv. 42–44).

Jeremiah, no less than the other prophets before him, had as his ideal a society of free men (2,14), in which respect for rights might be maintained through the responsible independence of the families of which Judah was the union (31,1). It was natural for him to think of the resurrection of his people as a sublimation of the kind of civilization he had always known and found to be good. There was a concomitant limitation in this vision, a defect —we must call it that—later to be remedied in the history of revelation by a progressive spiritualization of the notion of God's kingdom; but whatever it was, it was not "nomadic idealism."

Furthermore, while Jeremiah could not transcend the Old Tes-

tament in his messianic ideas, in his recognition that the divine promises were not, as the Rechabites thought, tied to some past attainment of human development, he included in his thinking that idea of progress on which our Lord capitalized in his fulfilment of the messianic hope. In Jeremiah's Yahweh-centred thought, it may be added, there was no room for that narrow nationalism that prevented so many of our Lord's contemporaries from accepting his completely developed spiritualization of the kingdom of God. The profound difference between the nationalistic and Jeremiah's conception of Yahweh's will we can see illustrated in the account of the prophet's final relations with Zedekiah, as told in c. 38.

I have suggested above that a modern reader, living in an age when the individual citizen's life is probably more determined by the day-by-day policies of his nation than at any other time in Christian history, may take away a more sympathetic view of Jeremiah's enemies than the author of these stories ever intended. The prophet was, after all, advocating the surrender of his country with all the influence he could bring to bear; from a nationalist point of view, his words to the people as recorded in 38,2 f. were sheer defeatism.[5] Men nervous under the tensions of warfare are not in the habit of enquiring closely into the motives of those who are preaching sedition. The captain of the guard accused Jeremiah of deserting to the Chaldeans at a time when many Jews were doing just that (38,19). What happened to Jeremiah as a result of his obedience to a higher loyalty than that of the state, his near death from being thrown into an empty cistern, was almost certainly a milder penalty than what would be meted out to him today under similar circumstances. For all its genuine respect for

[5] In 38,4 the princes of Judah say of Jeremiah that "he weakens the hands of the soldiers." Between 1935–1938 the archeologists at Lachish found Hebrew letters on ostraca, the remains of a military correspondence from the period of the Babylonian siege, and in one of these letters the writer complains of these very princes of Jerusalem using the identical words found in the Bible. Evidently such charges and countercharges were the common coin of Judah's last desperate days.

the individual conscience, our present age has done little to solve the problem of how to deal with the man who disagrees with the prevailing politics of the nation. Nor does anything suggest that such a solution will be found; rather, even in democratic states, more and more it will be presumed that the individual must subordinate his other considerations to national interests. It would take quite as much courage today as it evidently took Ebed-melech the Ethiopian courtier—a foreigner!—to side with Jeremiah and save his life (38,7–13).

Zedekiah was consistent to the end. Having acceded to the violence offered Jeremiah, he allowed him to remain a prisoner until the Babylonian conquest of the city. At the same time he consulted the prophet still, but timidly, in fear of his own courtiers. Unable to do more than wait out the inevitable, unwilling and yet tempted to follow Jeremiah's counsel, he did nothing.

The final scenes of the conquest and its aftermath have been sufficiently summarized above. The whole lively chronicle should be read through in cc. 39–44. Released from prison by the Chaldeans, Jeremiah was permitted to choose whether he would have an honored estate in Babylon or remain with the remnant of Judah in Palestine. As we know, he elected to stay with his people. In c. 44 we read his last recorded prophecy, delivered to his countrymen in Egypt, where he had unwillingly accompanied them after their murder of his friend Gedeliah. He had not, as we see, broken faith with his mission, nor had the Judahites become less contumacious or obdurate in their exile. The narrative leaves him rejected by his people, an old man nearing seventy. The tradition that he ended by being murdered is not unlikely.

6. THE NEW COVENANT

Thus Judah the nation ceased to be, never again to be really restored. The postexilic Jewish state, which for a brief time was under the leadership of Zerubbabel, grandson of Jehoiachin, and which always existed by the sufferance of foreign political powers,

was a shadow of vanished glory that never really took on substance. The religious force that was to be born of the exile was not a restored Israel, but Judaism, which embraced a new conception of nation and people in their relation to God's revelation.

The Jewish commonwealth was, therefore, only a partial realization of the prophetic prediction that Yahweh would bring back his people. The true fulfilment of the prophets' dreams, which included all the spiritual goods they had yearned for, we believe as Christians to have been realized in the New Testament. The earliest Christian community, bone and flesh of the bone and flesh of Israel, was taught by its Founder to see in itself the holy remnant, that Israel of faith in which the prophets had placed their hopes and to which they had promised salvation in Yahweh's name. Into that remnant, as branches are grafted to a vinestock, we Christians who are not of the bone and flesh of Israel have been brought by a common faith and a common salvation (Rom 11,13–22). The breadth of this vision of salvation—we have already said this many times—was not the revelation of any Old Testament prophet, but only of God's own Son.

Jeremiah is no exception to this rule of the divine economy. In his prophecies of salvation he is entirely traditional, perpetuating not only the thought but also the language and thought patterns of his prophetic predecessors.

> If you swear, "As Yahweh lives!,"
> in truth, in right, and in righteousness,
> then the nations will bless themselves in him,
> and in him they will rejoice (4,2).

Jeremiah's vision is not shortsighted; he conceives that the consequences of Israel's repentance will be an extension of its covenant with Yahweh to all mankind. But it is the covenant of *Israel* that is to be extended. The ancient formula, "As Yahweh lives!," is Jeremiah's implicit allusion to the doctrine of election on which

the covenant was founded (cf. Hos 4,15); his qualification of it is to capsulize the purpose of election in its moral imperatives, fulfilling which Israel was to be a light to the nations.

The prophets before the exile were sent one and all to deal with a nation that was at the same time a religion; it would take the experience of the exile to reveal that the two could be separated. When their oracles concern other nations than Israel, it is always in respect to their relation to Israel.

It is not too hard to discern the divine purpose in all of this. The time was not yet when the wider destinies of the divine plan for mankind could be made known. First, a people had to be impressed with the sense of its mission to be the instrument of this plan—and with what partial success the prophets labored to this end, we have now seen very well. The metaphors they used—Israel the wife of Yahweh, the vine, Yahweh's child, and the like—with which they related the people to its God and providential history, all were intended to have a social force; Israelites were conceived as a unity, and prophetic preaching was directed toward the preservation of this unity through the social virtues. For by election and the covenant Yahweh had brought into being a people, not just an aggregation of individual Israelites.

The Semitic sense of solidarity in which society itself was only the family writ large was the presupposition of the prophetic emphasis on the corporate identity of Yahweh's people, its distinct character that differentiated it from all others in its peculiar destiny and obligations. Jeremiah fought along with the rest of the prophets for this ancient conception as an integral part of Israelite tradition.

It has been thought and said—by modern observers, that is, rather than by the biblical Israelites themselves—that because of this corporate sense prophetic preaching was in a measure self-defeating, involved in a contradiction from which it was rescued by a newer idea, first glimpsed by Jeremiah and then developed fully by Ezekiel. If, as the prophets proclaimed, Yahweh had set up Israel the nation for destruction because of its injustices, then

—so runs this argument—there was no incentive for just dealing offered to the individual Israelite; he was in no position to free himself from a doom that must inevitably fall on the whole people. The fallacy in this argument I think we have seen. From the first, the prophets addressed themselves to individuals as well as to the people at large. Even Amos entertained the possibility of a remnant to be saved. Isaiah was conscious of a forgiveness of his own sins that separated him from a sinful people and made him an exemplar to the just remnant to whom salvation was promised. There is no lack of personal religion in the prophets, nor is there any evidence that their preaching meant less to the individual because it concentrated its attention, in the very nature of things, on the people as a unit.

Nevertheless, it is true that as Israel the nation inexorably passed into the annals of history that returns no more, the two prophets who stood already with one foot in the exile did have some awareness of a change that was to come. Jeremiah's part in this lay in his prophecy of the new covenant. His words as they now are probably belong to the concluding phase of his ministry. They are found within a collection of his salvation prophecies (cc. 30–31), however, some of which were originally uttered in respect to the northern Israel and only later were extended by him to Judah. Yahweh speaks of the restored Israel:

> "In those days they will no longer say: 'The fathers have eaten green grapes, and their children's teeth have been set on edge,' but everyone will die for his own iniquity, and only that man who has eaten the green grapes will have his teeth set on edge. Behold, the days are coming—oracle of Yahweh —when I shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt, my covenant which they violated, though I was their master—the oracle of Yahweh. But this is the covenant that I shall make

with the house of Israel after those days—the oracle of Yahweh: I shall put my law within them, and have it written on their hearts, and I shall be God to them and they will be a people to me. And no longer will a man rebuke his neighbor nor a man his brother, saying, 'Know Yahweh!'; for all of them will know me, from their least to their greatest—the oracle of Yahweh. For I shall pardon their iniquity, and their sin I shall no longer remember" (31,29–34).

The new covenant, when all is said and done, will differ from the old in that it will be in practice what the old was in theory. Its terms are those of the old covenant: as before, Yahweh's law will be in the midst of the people and written on their hearts, and as before, the essence of religion must be the knowledge of God. Only, this time Yahweh will truly be known, his law will truly be reverenced, so that there will be no need for the rebukes that all the prophets have had to give this people.

As part of the secret of the continued success of the new covenant, Yahweh will assume a somewhat new attitude to the members of the covenant. That is to say, in the future he will impute the guilt of personal crimes only to the individual evildoer, not to the community of which he is a member. In the future no one may have cause to complain against Yahweh's justice, rightly or wrongly, as some of Jeremiah's contemporaries were now complaining, that the children of a later generation are suffering the consequences of the sins of their fathers. The age to come will witness an era in the salvific plan when God will permit the individual to harm himself, if he must, but not to subvert the community. This oracle is not a compromise with the selfish individualism that had disrupted the first unity created by Yahweh's covenant; Jeremiah does not repudiate the social principle, now or for the future. The emphasis on individual retribution will strengthen, not weaken what is to be a society of the faithful.

Neither in Jeremiah nor in Ezekiel may we see the founder of

a new personal religion, in the sense that before them religion had been conceived only as communal with all personal obligations absorbed into those of the people. The principle of personal retribution had long prevailed in Israelitic jurisprudence, replacing the cruder deductions from the conviction of corporate responsibility that had unquestionably characterized Israel's earlier days, which can shock the modern reader by their stark literalness and lack of feeling. Personal retribution was the law of Deuteronomy (Dt 24,16), and a Deuteronomic historian was able to exemplify the practice of this law in the past that had antedated the written law-code in Judah (2 Kgs 14,6). Israel knew that God, who is not less just than his children, would not reward or punish contrary to what he himself had taught them were the rules of justice and equity. The teaching of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, therefore, represents at the most a new emphasis on personal accountability, not a new conception of God and his justice.

What we as modern Westerners are tempted to overlook are the perennially valid claims of justice that the principle of corporate responsibility tried, even though sometimes clumsily, to safeguard. Man is, for better or worse, a member of the small or large social groups to which he belongs, and he cannot cut himself off entirely from the consequences of his membership, whether these be good or bad. The old pronouncement on punishment to the third and fourth generation (Ex 20,5) enshrined a truth about God and man with which, perhaps, we are becoming reacquainted nowadays when the world has once more shrunk in size and it is impossible not to recognize that a deed done in any part of this world can be fraught with consequence not only for the world as a whole but for generations unborn. Much of what our fathers and grandfathers thought of as purely private in nature, no one today will try to pretend is not, instead, the vital concern of society itself.

Jeremiah accepted this truth as much as any prophet before him (cf. Jer 32,18). Neither he nor Ezekiel believed that the earlier prophets had tried to do the impossible in calling the nation back

to God; not for this reason do they stress individual responsibility. They only saw—and how dimly!—that as the old Israel was now passing away, the covenant of the future would have to rely for its solidarity on something other than the common blood and soil. They insisted to the end, however, that Yahweh could not be well served except in the social relation that he had willed to be.

It is very plain, when we read Jeremiah's salvation oracles, that he looked for a new Israel from the exile, an Israel that would have most of the qualities of the old save only its sins. This is even more obvious in Ezekiel's prophecies, where, in fact, there appears a detailed blueprint of the new Israel seen in utopian vision, complete with temple, ritual, sacrifices, king, and tribal boundaries.

The visions of these prophets, and of Hosea and Isaiah who preceded them, achieved at best a hollow and sorry echo in the postexilic Jewish commonwealth that rose again on Palestinian soil. As the postexilic prophets soon reveal, virtually every evil that the pre-exilic prophets had condemned returned to haunt the instable little group of refugees who had learnt practically nothing from the disastrous history of their ancestors. Anyone whose view is limited to the Old Testament's account of itself would have to say that prophecy had failed, and that Jeremiah had, in the end, failed worst of all. Alfred Loisy's scornful quip, that the miracle of Pentecost brought forth not the kingdom of God but only the Church, could be paraphrased to suit this case. Instead of the new Israel, Judaism appeared; and Judaism even in principle, let alone in practice, fell short of the prophetic ideal.

Luckily the Old Testament does not say the final word on itself. We have been taught by One greater than the prophets to see its fulfilment in an Israel that is truly new, an Israel that is not of the flesh but of the spirit. It requires no special brief for Christianity for one to agree that never has a fulfilment been more satisfying and complete. It requires, however, a sense of awe at the mystery of God's unsearchable ways; for it was a fulfilment quite as unexpected as it was hoped for and awaited.

CONCLUSION

The Endurance of Prophecy

1. THE PROPHETIC TRADITION

Differ though they did in many ways, I believe we have seen that in everything that we would have to deem essential the prophets were as one. It is profitable and even necessary to point up the varieties of prophecy and of the prophetic experience that separate an Amos from an Hosea or an Isaiah from a Jeremiah, but there is hardly anyone who would seriously question that, in the balance, the prophets conspire in a common school of thought.

We can go further. Not only do they form a single school of thought, they spring from a common inspiration and have all drawn from a common tradition. Never in any instance does any one of them give us to understand that in his cardinal assumptions he was making a new assertion. The very opposite, in fact, is constantly presumed. The prophets from whom we receive the prophetic word for the first time in sustained fashion obviously spoke a language that was understood by eighth-century Israel; they built on premises that were held to be valid, however grudgingly, and however seldom they were used.

Acknowledging this fact, as most do acknowledge it today, has taken from the prophets only a specious originality that they would never have claimed for themselves. There is no doubt of the difference between prophetic religion and that of many, if not most, of

their contemporaries; but, to pursue an example I have used before, it was the kind of difference that distinguished Francesco Bernardone from his father. There were not two religions, nor did the prophets have a new conception of one. They beckoned back to the spirit of a religion that had been lost.

I think it is equally obvious that the prophets, for all their passion for reform and the social virtues, can hardly be called social reformers. This category they would neither have understood nor, probably, have accepted. They had no political or economic theory in any true sense. Though they could oppose and even cause the removal of kings, and though they constantly denounced the abuse of wealth and power, never did they attempt to tamper seriously with the economic or political machinery of Israel and Judah. In this sense, their efforts were never radical. A modern reformer, in fact, would have to reproach them, on his principles, for their naïve handling of the social problem. Never did they go to the heart of the matter, to devise ways and means of solving the problem once and for all by changing the system. But for the prophets there was only one problem, and Israel's social vices were nothing more than one of its many symptoms.

We would look to the prophets in vain, therefore, for a social philosophy. We may not even ask them for a social theology, in the sense that the social question was ever isolated for them in their comprehension of the God-and-man relationship. We do find, if we wish to give it a modern name, a kind of religious sociology professed by the prophets, that is, a set of social convictions that spring from their religious faith. But even to discern this, we have to systematize the prophets' thought in a way that they never did.

It is important to insist, as we have all along, that this prophetic sociology was peculiarly Israelitic. While in their moral teaching the prophets obviously suppose many transcendent truths recognized by all ages as derivative from natural law, for both their remote and their proximate motivation they appeal not to natural morality but to the revealed law of Yahweh. The natural law was also Yahweh's will, which he had expressed to his people by re-

vealing himself to them in history. The doctrine of election and the Exodus tradition, the source of so many of the prophets' religious conclusions, evidently concerned Israel alone. The prophets, in a word, taught no system of ethics, but rather a religious morality. To Israel they had been sent, and they did not extend their teaching beyond Israel, even though they knew very well that God would call other nations to account for their sins as well as Israel. They spoke in the name of one God whose moral will they knew to be universal, but with thorough practicality they brought their message to Israel in terms of its own historical experience of this God.

We have seen how unjustified were the attempts of former critics to get prophetic teaching in opposition to other parts of the Old Testament, notably to priestly law. The prophets, it is true, often denounced the priesthood, but for not doing its duty, not for doing it. The priesthood which, in large measure, was responsible for the tradition and the ultimate expression of Israel's religious laws now found mainly in the Pentateuch, the Law of Moses, was also doing the work of God. While it is a very complex problem to determine how much of the Mosaic Law existed in written form throughout the prophetic period, critics are now ready to recognize that its substance at least was there in one form or another, written or oral. And with that substance there is agreement in the prophets, who certainly do not contradict it and just as certainly furthered its purposes by their mediation of the living word. Legitimate differences of emphasis and viewpoint occur in many details, between prophet and prophet as between prophet and priest, but both prophecy and law were directed to a single agreed end.

Even less justified has been the attempt made at times to ascribe prophetic teaching to non-Israelite influences. We noted at the beginning of this book to what extent there is something comparable to prophetism among various Gentile peoples, but we also noted how different were the fruits that sprang from the common Semitic mother soil. The inspiration of prophetism is so clearly the issue of a traditional Israel whose roots are buried in antiquity,

it is the epitome of the unreal to pretend that its origins need be sought anywhere else. No one, of course, would imagine that the prophets were consciously dependent on outside influences: their struggle was too obviously against any such thing in their defence of all that was authentically Israelite. The suggestion, rather, is that Israel itself had taken from outside the moral tradition upheld by the prophets. Egyptologists, in particular, have been prone to make this claim, having as their chief argument a respectable mass of "wisdom" literature that is usually attributed to the so-called Middle Kingdom of Egypt (twelfth and thirteenth dynasties, 2000–1800 B.C.), an age that was evidently much concerned with social questions.

Now it is very true that the Egyptian reputation for wisdom was proverbial in ancient Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 5,10), and Jewish tradition did not hesitate to acknowledge its influence on Israel's formative period (cf. Acts 7,22). There is much in this wisdom literature, and in the lawcodes of Mesopotamia as well, for that matter, with which the prophets would have agreed. To the extent that the prophets professed a morality that agrees with the higher aspirations of other contemporary peoples, parallels will inevitably be found, some of them very striking parallels indeed. It is not necessary, to vindicate the unicity of Israel in the ancient Near East, to denigrate the better efforts of Gentile philosophers and lawgivers who, like the prophets, tried to integrate the moral life of man with his civic, social, and religious life.

But the best that the impartial observer can say is that some of Egypt's teachers upheld a humane ideal that approaches the prophetical. Elevated spirits both in Egypt and Babylonia tried their best to save religion from its all too usual contamination with magic and superstition and to move it in a moral direction. To conclude that these uncertain, tentative efforts could be the explanation of the moral teaching of Israel's prophets, connected as it is at every point with the God of revelation who dominates Israelitic history, would be nothing short of fantastic. There is evidence that Egyptian and other non-Israelite wisdom literature has penetrated the wisdom writings of the Old Testament. But the sages never pre-

tend to base their judgments on other than common sense and observation, at which an Egyptian could be quite as competent as an Israelite. The prophets, on the other hand, claimed to reveal the God of Israel's tradition, and there is no real evidence to dispute this claim.

The prophetic succession which we can trace from its somewhat complex beginnings through the so-called writing prophets down to the dissolution of Judah, did not perish with the exile. Ezekiel is the bridge from the prophetism of Israel to the prophetism of Judaism; there is a true continuity, even as the postexilic religion was a legitimate offspring of pre-exilic Israel. With changed conditions there was a change in prophetic emphasis, but the tradition went on.

As I have already indicated, it is impossible to do justice to the later prophetism in this book. The prophets of this later time were certainly not the inferiors of their pre-exilic compeers, but theirs is a different story. In some outstanding cases they have remained anonymous. In particular, the prophets responsible for the second (cc. 40–55) and third (cc. 56–66) parts of the Isaianic collection are in many respects among the most important of the Old Testament, fully worthy to stand with the great Isaiah as those who continued his work, undoubtedly consciously doing so, and who perfected it. But the other exilic and postexilic prophetic books are no less significant, each in its own way.

Prophecy still had many new words to speak. The doctrine of messianism, for one thing, was to be extended to the threshold of the New Testament in many and varied expressions, growing progressively more complex as the fulness of time drew nearer. Besides the prophets whose names we know or who are otherwise responsible for the substance of the various prophetic books, there were also many inspired writers who edited and enlarged on the salvation oracles of the earlier prophets to adapt them to the new vision of God that had been revealed in postexilic Judaism. These were true prophetic authors, genuinely in the prophetic succes-

sion, who evidence the vitality of a living religion that had not yet been allowed to fossilize in a dead letter.

We do no more here than simply acknowledge this continued growth and endurance. There were many themes yet to be played through before the old revelation was concluded, but the themes played in the theocratic kingdom were at an end. Never again would a king of the House of David sit on the throne of an earthly Israel.

Despite the vigor of postexilic prophecy, the institution of prophetism did not long survive the postexilic restoration. It would be impossible to set an exact date for its disappearance, but disappear it did. The prophetic spirit was soon withdrawn, and God was to continue his communication with Israel in other ways.

Even with the disappearance of prophetism, however, the prophetic influence was far from dead. Most of the best assertions of postexilic Judaism are dependent on it to a greater or less degree. The great Deuteronomist school of inspired writing, responsible for much of what we consider the characteristic theology of the Old Testament, was dependent alike on the lawcode of Deuteronomy and the prophets: we have noted the connection of this school with the editing of the Book of Jeremiah. The wisdom writers who partly supplied for the teaching function of prophecy in the postprophetic period laid no claim, as I just pointed out above, to have inherited the prophetic spirit. They were, however, careful students of the prophets, and it is this, perhaps more than anything else, that distinguishes their wise judgments from those of non-Israelite sages. Some of the later wisdom writings are mosaics of prophetic texts, combining the technique and approach of the international wisdom tradition with a content distinctively Israelitic.[1]

[1] The reader now has available a fine introduction to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament: *Seven Books of Wisdom* by Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1960). See especially pp. 143 ff. on the nature of Old Testament "wisdom" and the wisdom school of writing.

Apocalyptic, too, which begins at the end of the Old Testament but is really proper to intertestamental Judaism, was heavily indebted to prophetism. The apocalyptists consciously cast themselves in the role of continuing the prophetic tradition, and rightly so, since we can trace the beginnings of apocalyptic in prophets like Ezekiel and Joel. The first thoroughgoing apocalypse in the Bible is the Book of Daniel. In the intertestamental period before the coming of the New Testament fulfilment, many noncanonical apocalypses were produced, frequently in imitation of Daniel, all motivated by a single intention, though they differed quite often in content. The apocalyptists sensed—and how soundly!—that there was more to prophetic fulfilment than had been realized in the postexilic Judaism, and their purpose was to console their fellow religionists by encouraging them to look forward to a glorious day when all that the prophets had foretold would come to pass literally. Correspondingly, apocalyptic tends to be highly exuberant literature, lavish in its use of imagery and symbolism. We are all best familiar with its literary form in the New Testament Apocalypse, which both signalled the fulfilment of the Old Testament hope and returned apocalyptic to its origins in the opening up of a new prophetic vision of the new and lasting covenant.

In short, the Judaism that continued the pre-exilic Israel was dominated by prophecy in one fashion or another. Paradoxically, the prophets exercised a far wider influence over these later generations than they had ever done in their own. They had not succeeded in their mission to forestall Yahweh's punishment of Israel by bringing their people to repentance. They had gone unheeded and their message had been despised. They themselves had been at best ignored, and at worst they had been persecuted and destroyed. The postexilic community exemplifies the truth of our Lord's pronouncement, that a prophet is not without honor save in his own generation and among his own people.

Yet all of this, in a way, they had already foreseen. They did, to some extent, consciously build for an Israel not of this world; for if there was one truth to which they gave priority beyond all

others, it was that every lasting good must be the work not of man but of God, whose ways are unsearchable. In anticipating their inevitable rejection, as Amos and Isaiah explicitly did, the prophets were not so much pessimistic as aware of the divine mystery of grace. They knew that their mission had not been and could not be a failure, for they had spoken the word of God which cannot be broken. So much the less may we regard it a failure, who have seen the end of their prophecy.

2. THE TRANSCENDENCE OF PROPHETISM

The end of prophecy, we believe as Christians, is the Christ of the New Testament. We have already spoken of this more than once, and I plan to mention it one final time in the last section of this book that immediately follows this. It is, obviously, of undeniable importance to us in our reading of the prophets.

But it would, just as obviously, be wrong for us to limit our appreciation of the prophets to the fulfilment of a hope which the prophets themselves were never to see in their lifetimes. It would be wrong because it would distort out of all proportion the purposes of prophecy. It would reduce the prophets, and the Old Testament revelation itself, to an irrelevancy except in their purely anticipatory functions, and it would thereby completely falsify the history of God's dealing with man, which is a history of condescension. If the prophets have no meaning for us save when they have been bound in a single volume and separated by only a few pages from the Gospels, then we have a mean and ignoble appreciation of the dimensions of the divine love and mercy. If they have no relevance except to the New Testament, we must conclude that the people of the Old Testament were of concern to God only that they might yearn for a salvation they could never possess. By such a narrow view of the history of salvation we would withdraw all meaning from the faith of Israel. We would contradict the New Testament itself, for if the Gospel teaches that all men

have been saved by the grace of Christ, it insists no less that the faith of Israel and our own is one.

I hope that no one can have read the chapters of this book without agreeing that the life and work of the prophets have an enduring meaning quite apart from the degree in which they anticipated or did not anticipate the New Testament revelation. It is a meaning that we could not rightly determine and evaluate except by examining the prophets in their own proper historical and cultural milieu; but it is a meaning that applies without accommodation to everyone of every age who shares the prophets' faith, because of the transcendent truths to which their life and work were testimony.

The God in whose name the prophets spoke we recognize as our own. The moral code they upheld is a most cherished heritage of our Judeo-Christian civilization. It is true enough that the problems we face in our complicated twentieth-century world are not always the same problems that confronted the prophets, but we know that, as men of faith, our approach to our problems must be along the same lines that the prophets followed.

I stress this, *as men of faith*. We sense our oneness with the prophets precisely in this, that we share their view of a universe dominated by the will of God. We accept their belief, that God made things good, and that it is men who have entangled themselves in a variety of ways. We agree with their conviction that the God who made the world has revealed himself to man, and that man has a consequent duty to govern himself in keeping with this revelation. Furthermore, as Christians we believe that God has bound himself to mankind by an especial manifestation of his goodness, and that it is the privilege and right of men to draw near his holiness and become his sons. The social bond in which God had ordained that this be done the prophets knew as the covenant, as Israel. We know it as the Church, the new Israel. Our appreciation of God's ways and purposes is breath-takingly wider and deeper than the prophets', but, for all that, it is an appreciation that the prophets have given us.

The prophets are able to reproach us today quite as they reproached their contemporary Israel and Judah, and for precisely the same reasons. We are not such better men than our fathers that we are immune to the original sin of all religion, that it should become cant and hypocrisy. We are especially not immune to it these days, when a maniac kind of perversity has encouraged many Christians to espouse again the heresy of faith without works in their reaction to alien or merely other philosophies that have adopted, or pretended to adopt, the works of Christianity without its faith. We who share the prophets' faith do not read them aright if we are not sensible of the rebuke they offer continually to our complacency in the face of social and racial injustices, violations of the public trust, and other crimes that they condemned in the name of Israel's God and ours.

Simply because the message of the prophets is the living word of the living God, it continues to have meaning for us. It was not only in the Jerusalem of the seventh century B.C. that human dignity has been profaned, even by outwardly godly men, and that civil and religious leaders have betrayed their vocation through neglect or malice or cowardice. It was not only in eighth-century Bethel and Samaria that respectability has been confused with righteousness and material prosperity has been allowed to breed a selfish and soulless insularity. The voice that stirred Israel's conscience can and should stir our own, if we will hear it.

However, I am far from suggesting that the prophets can instruct us only in their dissent, important though it may be. Though dissent is negative, the faith that impelled it was and is supremely positive. Most of all, the prophets commend themselves to us for their religious optimism that has always been the seed of progress in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The prophets rejected the society in which they lived because they had measured it against an ideal that they believed to be realizable. They believed in this ideal not from any misplaced confidence in human determination and calculation, but because they believed in the kingdom of God. A reign of justice was possible

not because men had a natural disposition to justice—history had given the lie to this—but because justice was the will of an omnipotent God who could prevail over human weakness and malice. Man was caught up in no inexorable machinery of cause and effect that would lead him either to chaos or an earthly utopia; but man could further the will of God who was Lord even of history. Further, man must further God's will if he were to have lived as a man at all. Injustice could not be excused as the inevitable camp follower of economic and political change; injustice was a sin against the God of justice.

When we pray that God's kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven, we repeat the prayer of the prophets. Authentic Christianity has never despised this world, it has only feared it. Authentic Christianity has always acknowledged its mission to improve the world, for in it the kingdom of God begins. The saints have not withdrawn from the world because they gave it up, but to pray for it. The prophetic belief in the perfectibility of man and the moral imperative to betterment was preserved in the New Testament, and through it this belief has captivated the aspirations of our whole Christian civilization. So much is this true, the aspirations have remained even though for many the belief has long since faded.

In their revelation of a God who intervenes, a God of providence and of destiny, the prophets were our first bulwark against the mechanism of pagan naturalism on the one hand, and on the other the statics of a book religion, a frozen, unyielding legalism. They can remind us still of the absolutes that save religion from degenerating into a system of situational ethics, and they can keep us from confounding custom with truth and from the apotheosis of the *status quo*.

In these and many other ways the prophets have an enduring relevance for all who share their faith. Their relevance to anyone else, however genuine and sincere may be his conception of man's dignity and natural rights, is really only incidental and accidental. I do not intend here to minimize the function of the liberal thinker,

the man of good will wherever he may be found, of other religions or of none. Often enough it is he who forces to our attention a recognition of our failings and of duties left untended. But when we go to these duties at last, reluctantly or with alacrity, we go to them for different motives than those which prompted our prompters, and we go to them with a different view of man and of his purposes. We go to them with the view that the prophets had.

3. FRAGMENTARY AND VARYING UTTERANCES

> When men saw that He fulfilled so gloriously, and so finally, all that God had promised by His prophets of old, they found that they could do no other than confess "My Lord and my God." . . . Because He fulfills all that God had revealed of His own mind, will, purpose and nature under the Old Covenant, we affirm Jesus Christ to be the unique and supreme Revelation of God.[2]
>
> The Christian reader sees in Christ the central point which gives meaning to the entire process of God's dealings with man. He believes that Christ did actually, as his immediate followers supposed, complete the working out of the divine purpose in creation and redemption. The Church therefore took his fulfilment of the historical process recorded in the Scriptures as the key by which the real meaning of the whole of that process must be unlocked. Christ as the climax of the story gives unity and significance to all that had preceded him. At no stage within the process of pre-Christian history could its full meaning become apparent. The prophet might have his vision of the Suffering Servant of the Lord, but even the prophet himself could not grasp the full implications of his vision until the part of the Servant was actually undertaken and fulfilled by Christ. In the light of Christ's saving

[2] John McIntyre, *The Christian Doctrine of History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 49 f.

> work the meaning of the Servant poems [of Deutero-Isaiah] becomes intelligible in a way which no one previously, not even the prophet himself, could have perceived. At the same time the prophetic picture of the Servant illuminates and in some degree explains to us, the meaning of the Person and mission of Christ.[3]

I cite here the words of modern Protestant critical authors to underline the common belief of Christians in the unity of the Bible and, correspondingly, the need they have of explaining the relation of the one Testament to the other. The author of the second paragraph continues by making a point that I have endeavored to support throughout this book:

> We must not admit the absurd idea that the message of the prophets was meaningless or even incomplete for those to whom it was addressed, and that it was intended only for readers as yet unborn. The Christian, however, will naturally look back on the Old Covenant with its fulfilment in Christ continually in mind, and he will be able to discern in the light of the fulfilment how the earlier stages in the working out of the divine purpose, each of which was significant for its own time, fall into place in an harmonious pattern and foreshadow the character of the final culmination.

I believe it necessary, for the sake of this Christian reader, to add now a few final words on the *theory* of interpretation by which we are able to see in Old Testament prophecy a foreshadowing of New Testament teaching. This is necessary because by some schools of thought the process we use in doing this and the supposition on which it is based are rejected as unscientific and illegitimate.

[3] G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woollcombe, *Essays on Typology* (Studies in Biblical Theology No. 22; Naperville, Illinois: Allenson, 1957), p. 27.

The unity of the Bible, including the complementary character of the Old and New Testaments, is a logical conclusion for anyone who accepts Catholic teaching on scriptural inspiration and the objectivity of the historical process of salvation. Just as a one all-provident God called Abraham from Mesopotamia and Israel from Egypt in the opening acts of a drama whose closing scenes are even now being played out in the Church of Jesus Christ, the inspiring Spirit of this same God did not stir the minds and hearts of the Old Testament authors without regard to what the final result of his word would be. The Yahweh of the Old Testament is the Kyrios, the Lord, of the New. Even if one does not accept the Catholic teaching in all of its implications, he must admit that the writers of the Old and New Testaments possessed a common cultural and religious heritage that gives its own unity to the Bible, and that at least the authors of the New Testament wrote under this persuasion.

The problem involved in taking the Bible as a unity is a modern one, the product of the development of criticism and of historical research. It is a problem no less real for being modern, however, and we have no right to ignore it merely because it did not exist for our ancestors. The critical approach to the past and our ability to reconstruct history on scientific principles are precious acquisitions of an ever expanding human knowledge and the perennial desire of the human spirit to get a firmer grasp on reality. They are no less the gift of God than is the Scripture itself. In proportion as they epitomize certain and tested truths, no one today has the right—and Catholics have been specifically forbidden by supreme ecclesiastical authority—to interpret the historical documents of the Scripture to their disregard.

The New Testament itself offers us no guide for the critical employment of Old Testament prophecy in the service of Christian faith. The New Testament writers find Christ on every page of the Old Testament. They do so, however, as Christians writing for Christians, as exploiting one of the assumptions of their mutual faith. When Matthew, for example, cites a text like Hos 11,1 in

connection with the Holy Family's sojourn in Egypt (Mt 2,15), he does so in virtue of a typology that permitted him to refer to Christ virtually anything that in the Old Testament was stated of Israel. This typology the New Testament does not justify on historical principles. As a matter of fact, it is only by exception that the New Testament adheres to the strictly historical sense in its citations of the Old Testament.

Neither are the Fathers of the ancient Church of much help to us in this matter. The theological exegesis of the Fathers is patterned after that of the New Testament and ordinarily makes no attempt to deal with the Old Testament on historical principles. Even when the Fathers present what they confidently believe to be the "literal" meaning of an Old Testament passage, they tend to treat the Old Testament as though it were a Christian book written with only Christians in mind. I am not suggesting, of course, that patristic interpretation, let alone New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament, is valueless or that it has reached conclusions that do not command our assent. I am only pointing out that its methodology is largely one that we cannot follow today, now that we have learnt historical method and are convinced of its imperatives.

Ever since the medieval philosophers popularized a view of the world that we in the West have ever after continued to regard as a realistic one, it has been recognized that the only literal meaning of a given writing, the Sacred Scripture included, is the meaning intended by its author, the sense that he intended to convey when he set his pen to paper. The Scripture, it is true, has a divine as well as a human author, and the former could intend more than the latter. But any other "sense" of the Scripture, if it is to be genuinely scriptural at all, can only be an extension or an application of the literal sense, since by definition Scripture is the writing of an inspired *human* author. The Bible is not, as some of the Fathers appear to have believed, a mystical divine word concealed by the human letter, but rather a fusion of the divine Spirit with human expression. The word of God has been spoken through

the enlightened judgment of a human writer. Such is the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas and of his immediate predecessors and successors, and such has remained the Catholic conception of inspiration to this day.

Hence it is that there is no substitute for the historical process if we are to have the inspired meaning of the Scripture. The exegete or interpreter has no choice but to examine the writer in his historical, cultural, national, and conceptual context, to the extent that all this can be recreated, to see what he meant when and for whom he wrote. Nowadays this is much easier for us than it once was. Though many obscurities remain, the recreation of the past has been mightily aided by the advances in archeology, linguistic studies, and other like sciences. I have tried in this book to summarize the most assured results of this historical method in understanding the prophets of Israel.

How, then, connect the prophets with the New Testament without the sacrifice of critical principle? That there is and must be a connection, the New Testament itself and all Christian tradition leave us in no doubt. But as I have just said above, while the New Testament and the Fathers did not need to be bothered by critical principles, we must be.

The solution to this problem, as I have also tried to bring out in the course of this book, lies in the application of the same historical principles. Just as Judaism is a true development from the pre-exilic Israel, so is Christianity. It is a development, this must be understood, but it must be understood no less that the development is genuine, organically connected, with what Newman called the preservation of type. The primitive Christian community did not consider itself to be the remnant foretold by the prophets only because it was convenient to do so, only because it found itself fulfilling this role by some historical coincidence. It affirmed its identity with the remnant fully conscious that it was the true scion of Israel and the only Israel in which the prophetic aspiration could be realized. In precisely the same manner and with equal right our

Lord proclaimed himself to be the fulfilment of the messianic hope and soteriological expectation of the Old Testament.

Just as Jesus Christ is more than the prophetic Messiah, the Church is more than the prophetic remnant. There has been development along with the preservation of type. The preservation of type allows us to speak of fulfilment, for not only is the New Testament on its own admission inconceivable without the Old, the Old Testament on its own admission is incomplete. The New Testament complements the Old in a way that postbiblical Judaism does not. When we assert development, on the other hand, we acknowledge a newness of revelation that has given to those who have received it a deepened understanding of the meaning of prophecy. In the light of its fulfilment, the prophetic word is better understood by us than by those to whom it was first committed.

Yet the word itself has not changed; it is only that we can take it in more fully because we have seen the completion of the divine plan of salvation which the prophet himself saw only fragmentarily. The prophet, as a matter of fact, the chosen vessel to whom the word was communicated, was not necessarily accorded any light beyond his fellows on what the fulness of the word would be in God's time. He takes his place within a gradual succession; he does not, as we do, stand outside it. "In many fragmentary and varying utterances, God spoke of old to our ancestors through the prophets; at the present time, the final epoch, he has spoken to us through his Son" (Heb 1,1). The prophet foretold a messianic king of justice and righteousness, a new Israel, and a new covenant. This is the committed word, on which we can make no improvement. The prophet conceived of these divine works, however, in all the limitations of his age and background, and on his conception we have been able to improve a great deal in view of God's revelation through his Son.

In part I am now repeating what I already tried to bring out in the third chapter of this book. The new note that I intend here, of course, is the propriety with which we assimilate the fragmentary and varying utterances of prophecy and read in them the New

Testament pattern. Our right to do this is clear, and is no departure from the critical study of the Bible.

The theory of interpretation I favor here agrees closely with what has been proposed by Dom Célestin Charlier in his invaluable guide to the Christian reading of the Bible.[4] It is preferable, I think, to the interpretative method of other authors which goes on the supposition that the actual words of a prophetic text can have a dual meaning, one intended by the inspired author and another by the divine author alone. This theory of a *sensus plenior* or "fuller sense" is defended by some eminent Catholic scholars whom it would be unjust to dismiss in the few words I am giving to the subject. I will only add to what I have already said above that it appears to me to be an unnecessary hypothesis evolved to solve the critical problem.

Furthermore, although I have absolutely no intention of enlarging on the matter at this time, I would point out that it is only through the historical method that we may implement the ancient argument from the fulfilment of prophecy to which Christianity has always appealed even from New Testament times in its apologetic to the man seeking faith. The existence and determination of a *sensus plenior* are conclusions from faith, which apologetics may not presuppose. The magnitude of the Christian fulfilment is likewise a recognition given by faith, but this recognition is eased for the seeker by the reconstruction of the historical development that constitutes the bridge between the Old Testament and the New. This is the traditional task of Christian apologetics.

And if it performs this task well, the fragmentary and varying utterances of prophecy unite in a single voice for him who would answer the question fraught with timeless consequence: "What think you of Christ?"

[4] *The Christian Approach to the Bible*, trans. by Hubert J. Richards and Brendan Peters (Westminster, Maryland: Newman, 1958). See his ninth chapter on Christian interpretation.

APPENDIX

KINGS AND PROPHETS IN APPROXIMATE RELATION

B.C. 1030		Saul	Samuel
1010		David	Nathan Gad
970		Solomon	
930	Rehoboam	Jeroboam	Ahijah of Shiloh (1 Kgs 11) Shemaiah (2 Ch 12,5) Iddo (2 Ch 12,15)
	Abijam		
910	Asa	Nadab	Azariah ben Obed (2 Ch 15) Hanani (2 Ch 16,7 ff.)
		Baasha	Jehu ben Hanani (1 Kgs 16)
		Elah	
885		Zimri	
		Tibni	
		Omri	

875	Jehoshaphat	Ahab	Elijah Micaiah ben Imlah (1 Kgs 22) Jehaziel ben Zechariah (2 Ch 20) Eliezer ben Dodavahu (2 Ch 20,37)
	Jehoram	Ahaziah	
850	Ahaziah	Joram	Elisha
	Athaliah	Jehu	
800	Joash	Jehoahaz	Zechariah ben Jehoiada (2 Ch 24)
	Amaziah	Jehoash	
780	Azariah (Uzziah)	Jeroboam II	Jonah ben Amittai (2 Kgs 14,25) Amos Hosea
		Zechariah	
		Shallum	
750	Jotham	Menahem	
		Pekahiah	
735	Ahaz	Pekah	Oded (2 Ch 28,9 ff.) Isaiah Micah
		Hoshea	

APPENDIX

KINGS AND PROPHETS IN APPROXIMATE RELATION (*Continued*)

715	Hezekiah	
695	Manasseh	Hozai(?) (2 Ch 33,19)
640	Amon	
	Josiah	Nahum Zephaniah Habakkuk Huldah (2 Kgs 22,14) Jeremiah Uriah ben Shemaiah (Jer 26,20)
608	Jehoahaz	
	Jehoiakim	
597	Jehoiachin	Ezekiel
586	Zedekiah	

Index

Aaron, 149
Abiathar, 32, 246
Abimelech, 63
Abraham, 21, 291
Absalom, 69
Achor, 110
Adad-nirari II, 101
Adad-nirari III, 73, 102
Admah, 128
Ahab, 27, 36, 37, 71–73, 102, 139, 255
Ahaz, 130–132, 138–140, 164, 177, 178, 181–183, 187, 255, 256
Ahijah, 36
Ahikam ben Shaphan, 256
Albright, W. F., quoted, 23
Amaziah of Bethel, 75, 78, 86
Amaziah of Judah, 136
Ammon(ites), 67, 80, 136, 221
Amon, 135, 211, 213, 214, 222, 224, 231
Amorite, 93, 218
Amos, 19–21, 29, 30, 33, 35–37, 44, 45, 54, 55, 61–97, 98, 99, 104, 127–129, 132, 164, 171, 198, 201, 203, 215, 224, 249, 255, 258, 274, 278, 285
Anathoth, 46, 53, 241, 246
Antiochus Epiphanes IV, 56
Aphek, 65
Apocalyptic, 57, 111, 141, 155, 163, 221, 284
Arabah, 68, 134, 136
Arabia, 71, 179
Aram(eans), 67, 80, 96, 138, 167, 183, 218
Ark of the Covenant, 65, 67, 124, 196, 247
Asa, 36, 134, 135
Asherah, 113
Ashkelon, 236
Ashur, 101
Ashurbanipal, 41, 42, 104, 212, 213, 217, 218
Ashurnasirpal II, 101–102
Ashuruballit II, 218–219, 235–236
Assyria(ns), 4, 5, 46, 53, 73, 87, 100–103, 136–140, 166–170, 191, 212–214, 217–221, 249
Athaliah, 135–136
Auvray, Paul, quoted, 202
Azariah ben Obed, 36
Azariah of Judah: see Uzziah
Azekah, 266
Azriau, 138

Baal, 32, 37, 41, 64, 93, 107, 110, 124, 215, 249, 261
Baasha, 36, 134–135
Babylon(ians), 4, 5, 40, 51, 53, 54, 57, 74, 101, 137, 153, 168, 213, 218, 219, 226–230, 236–239, 249, 263, 281, 282
Babylonian exile, 8, 56, 239, 257, 264, 273
Balaam, 149–150
Balak, 149–150
Barak, 63
Baru priests, 31–32, 41
Baruch, 49, 232–234, 244, 256, 257, 259
Bedawin, 179, 268
Ben-Hadad I, 134
Ben-Hadad III, 79
Benjamin, 66, 80, 100, 134, 269
Beth-Eden, 79
Bethel, 15, 19, 20, 37, 62, 64, 75, 77–86, 87, 212, 252
Beth-Ephrathah, 157–158
Beth-gader, 157
Bethlehem, 158
Beth-shemesh, 136
Bikeath-Aven, 79

Book of the Covenant, 84
Bribery, 82, 85–86, 90, 178, 224
Byblos, 33

Calneh, 88
Canaan(ites), 23, 41, 63, 64, 69, 79, 82, 93, 113, 117, 118, 123, 124, 150, 151, 154
Caphtor, 96
Carchemish, 71, 133, 219, 226, 232, 236
Carmel, 61, 97
Chaldeans: see Babylon(ians)
Charlier, Célestin, cited, 295
Chemosh, 32
Commercialism, 69–70, 83–84, 87, 117, 136–138, 154, 170, 223
"Confessions" of Jeremiah, 48, 234, 241–244, 257
Cornill, C. H., quoted, 14
Corporate personality, 125, 273, 276–277
Corvée, 68, 135
Covenant, Israelite, 84, 94–95, 111, 121–126, 150, 190–193, 239, 245, 271–278
Cult, prophets' attitude toward, 91, 124, 150–151, 215, 230
Cult prophets, 18–20, 118–119

Damascus, 72, 73, 79, 102, 133, 138, 183
Dan, 65
David(ic), 32, 35, 66–69, 70, 71, 135, 137, 157, 180, 182–190, 203, 205, 258, 262, 283
Davidson, A. B., quoted, 240
Day of Yahweh, 94–95, 110, 150, 155, 173, 203, 221
Dead Sea Scrolls, 57, 176, 225–226, 228
Debir, 137
Deborah, 21, 63
Debt slaves, 238, 264–266
Decalogue, 114
Deeds of Yahweh, 150–151, 174–175
Deuteronomic law, 25–27, 41, 166, 181, 214–217, 245–249, 258, 265, 276, 283
Deuteronomic writers, 166, 233–234, 245, 252, 283
Diaspora, 57
Dibon, 73
Divination, 31–32, 35, 41
Doughty, C. M., quoted, 179

Earthquake of Amos, 77
Ebed-melech, 271
Eclipse, solar (Amos), 77
Ecstatic prophets, 19–20, 22–23, 29–35, 44, 93
Edom(ites), 67, 68, 80–81, 126, 135–136, 212
Eglon, 68
Egypt(ians), 4–5, 33, 40, 42, 71, 87, 101–102, 133, 167, 191–193, 217–218, 226–230, 281–282
Eichrodt, Walther, quoted, 30
El Gibbor, 206–207
Elath, 134, 135
Election of Israel, 92–97, 122, 203, 272–273
Eliakim: see Jehoiakim
Elijah, 27, 36–37, 38, 72, 255, 258
Elisha, 19, 22, 29, 36, 37
El-Jib, 137
En-Fara, 46
Ephod, 31–32, 112–113
Ephraim, 63, 66, 70, 100, 115–117, 124, 128, 183
Esarhaddon, 104, 136, 212, 213
Esau, 126
Eschatology, 6, 155, 188, 201
Eshnunna, lawcode, 43
Ethbaal, 72
Exodus from Egypt, 94, 96, 110, 122, 149, 151, 251, 266
Ezekiel, 8–9, 25, 33, 38, 44, 51, 158, 238, 239, 263, 273, 275, 276, 277, 282, 284
Ezion-Geber, 135

Faith, 182–183, 192, 228, 286
False prophets, 21–28, 85, 146, 220, 224, 261
Fertility rites, 82, 107
Foreign alliances, 123, 167–168, 178, 190–195

Gad, 32
Galilee, 100, 103, 114, 185, 190
Gath, 88
Gaza, 133
Geba, 53
Gedeliah, 239, 256, 271
Gehazi, 37
Gemariah, 257
Gezer, 68, 217
Gibeah, 53, 66, 67, 124, 135
Gibeon, 64, 137
Gideon, 63
Gihon, 167
Gilead, 79, 80, 100, 116
Gilgal, 15, 19, 149–150
Gomer and Israel, 105–114
Gomorrah, 53, 118
Good shepherd, 159, 261
Greeks, 65

Habakkuk, 225–230
Hadad-Rimmon, 139
Haggi, 188
Hamath, 88
Hammurabi, lawcode, 43
Hanameel ben Shallum, 268
Hananiah ben Azzur, 26, 43, 261, 263
Haran, 217–218, 236
Harlotry = apostasy, 106–109, 123
Hasmoneans, 4, 56
Hazael, 73, 79, 135
Hazor, 31, 41, 64, 68
Heaton, E. W., quoted, 24
Hebron, 66, 137
Hendiadys in Hebrew, 83
Hermon, 90
Hezekiah, 130, 131–132, 140, 157, 164–170, 211–212, 215, 221
Hiel, 72
Hierodule, 40, 82, 107, 109
Hinnom (Ben-hinnom), 182, 256
Hittites, 5, 150
Hophra, 265
Horst, Friedrich, cited, 229
Hosea, 20, 35, 36, 38, 51, 85, 98–129, 148, 164, 172, 199, 201, 203, 215, 249, 254–255, 258, 278
Hoshea, 103–104
Huldah, 216, 245
Hurrians, 5, 150

Immanuel, 160, 163, 182–190, 201
Industrial revolution in Judah, 137
Inspiration, prophetic, 47–48, 76, 106–114, 196–198, 240–244
Irijah, 266
Isaiah, 15, 20, 38, 47, 51, 53, 118, 140, 158, 160, 162–207, 249, 255, 262, 274, 278, 285
Ishbaal, 66
Ishtar, 39

Jacob, 120, 124–126, 143, 146, 147, 155, 206
James, William, cited, 40
Jehoahaz of Israel, 73
Jehoahaz of Judah, 135, 235, 258
Jehoash, 74, 136
Jehoiachin (Coniah), 26, 213, 237, 263, 271
Jehoiakim (Eliakim), 52–53, 229–230, 232–233, 234, 235–237, 241, 253–262, 263
Jehoram, 135
Jehoshaphat, 135
Jehu, king of Israel, 22, 73, 79, 99, 102, 108, 126, 136
Jehu ben Hanani, 36
Jeremiah, 8, 15, 20, 26, 33, 37, 43, 45–46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52–53, 86, 198, 216, 220, 226, 232–277, 278, 283
Jericho, 72
Jeroboam I, 36, 124
Jeroboam II, 62, 74–75, 89, 99, 101, 108, 255

Jerusalem, 15, 37, 51, 52–53, 57, 67, 88, 118, 140, 157, 168, 174, 222–223, 235, 237, 239, 254, 260, 265–266
Jerusalem temple, 15, 124, 139, 155, 173, 211, 213, 215, 230, 237, 239, 247, 252–253
Jesus Christ, 55, 114, 159, 184, 185, 186, 253, 272, 277, 289–295
Jezebel, 36, 37, 72–73, 136
Jezreel, 63, 106–108
Jinn, 33
Joash, 135
Joel, 284
Jonah ben Amittai, 74
Jonathan the scribe, 266
Jordan valley, 72
Joshua, 63, 72, 253
Joseph = Israel, 89, 91, 124
Josiah, 135, 166, 169, 212, 214–219, 220, 221, 233, 234, 240, 245–255, 256, 260
Jotham, 131–132, 138, 167, 177
Judah, 67, 70–71, 75, 103, 108, 133–140, 170–176, 211–219, 223–224, 226–230, 234–239
Judaism, 8–9, 57, 272, 277, 283–284, 293–294
Judges (period), 63, 64, 66, 67, 84, 253

Kahin, 33
Karnak, 71
Khorsabad, 167
Kingship, Israelite, 64–74, 84, 113, 124, 157–161, 176–190, 217, 222, 257–262, 263–264
Kir, 80, 96
Knowledge of God, 119–121, 172, 201, 254
Kohen, 33
Kush (ites), 96

Lachish, 135–136, 168, 235, 266, 270
Lampe, G. W. H., quoted, 289–290
Latifundism, 141–142, 175–176, 269
Law and prophets (see also: Religion, Torah), 16–17
Lebanon, 229–230
Lebo Hamath, 74
Le Roy, Alexander, quoted, 2–3
Lipit-Ishtar, lawcode, 43
Literal meaning of Scripture, 5–7, 292–295
Liturgical background of prophecy, 150, 155, 196–197, 230
Love of God, 106–107, 122–123, 151–152, 285
Loyalty (hesed), 115, 122–123, 145, 151, 202

Maccabees, 4, 56
McIntyre, John, quoted, 289
Magic and religion, 40, 282
Mahhu priests, 32
Manasseh, 140, 168, 169, 211–214, 222, 224, 231, 238
Massebah, 112–113
Mattaniah: see Zedekiah
Medes, 54, 218
Megiddo, 68, 133, 135, 169, 217, 219, 234
Memshath, 137
Menahem, 99, 101, 103
Mendelsohn, Isaac, cited, 32
Merodach-baladan, 168, 218
Mesha, 32, 73
Mesopotamia (n), 5, 31, 34, 46, 71, 133, 185, 239, 281
Messianism, 5–6, 54–58, 111, 152–161, 169, 176–190, 201–202, 261–263, 282, 289–295
Micah, 35, 130–161, 165, 175, 201, 203, 249, 256
Micaiah ben Imlah, 25, 36, 43, 47, 133, 181
Milkom, 221
Miriam, 21, 149
Mizpah, 135, 212
Moab (ites), 32, 67, 73, 80–81, 136, 149
Moneylending, 82, 86, 179
Morality and religion, 40–43, 281–282
Moresheth, 132–133

Moses, Mosaic, 21, 36, 37, 66, 149, 203, 280
Murphy, Roland E., cited, 283

Nabi, 21–28, 29–35, 36, 75, 76
Nabopolassar, 218–219, 226
Naboth, 37, 72, 84, 142
Nahum, 218, 219–221, 226
Nathan, 35
Nazirites, 23, 93–94
Nebuchadnezzar, 219, 232, 236–239, 257
Nebuzaradan, 238
Neco II, 135, 217–218, 229, 235–236, 257
Neo-Babylonians: see Babylon(ians)
Nineveh, 41, 101, 168, 218, 219
No-Amon (Thebes), 220
Nob, 53

Omri, 71–73, 104, 139
Ophir, 68

Pashhur, 257
Patristic interpretation, 292–293
Pautrel, R., quoted, 251
Pekah, 103
Pekahiah, 101, 103
Persia(ns), 53, 163, 218
Personal responsibility, 273–277
Philistines, Philistia, 23, 30, 65–66, 67, 80, 102, 168, 253
Phoenicia(ns), 67, 68, 71–72, 80, 102, 229–230, 236
Poor, poverty, 189–190, 224–225, 250–251
Porteous, Norman, quoted, 17–18
Prediction, prophetic, 25–26, 52–58, 260, 294–295
Priesthood, Israelite, 18, 119, 147, 224, 248, 280
Pritchard, James B., cited, 32
Prostitution, ritual, 40, 82,107, 109
Psammeticus I, 217–218
Pul: see Tiglath-pileser III
Punishment, medicinal purpose, 92, 109–110

Qarqar, 73, 102, 104, 167

Ramah, 19, 134
Rechabites, 73, 267–268, 270
Red Sea, 68, 212
Rehoboam, 36, 69–70, 133, 134
Religion, prophetic, 13–15, 38, 84–85, 91–92, 148–151, 195–207, 241–244, 253, 268, 278–280, 286–289
Remnant, doctrine of, 55, 91–92, 153, 182, 200, 202–207, 272, 274, 293–294
Renan, Ernest, cited, 38
Restoration of Israel, 55, 156, 266–270
Rezin, 138
Robinson, Theodore, quoted, 154

Salvation prophecy, 98, 111, 159–161, 234, 272, 274–275, 282
Samaria, Samaritan, 71–72, 74, 87, 88, 89, 104, 130, 138, 140, 166, 252, 258
Samson, 65
Samuel, 19, 22, 29, 35, 38, 65, 69, 253
Sargon II, 104, 130, 167–168
Saul, 21, 22, 35, 66, 68
Scribe, 248
Scythians, 218
Sea of the Arabah, 74
Seer, 21
Seierstad, Ivar, quoted, 27–28
Sennacherib, 108, 131–132, 138, 156, 168–169, 177, 198, 235
Sensus plenior, 295
Septuagint Greek, 35, 184, 232, 234
Shallum of Israel, 99, 101
Shallum (Jehoahaz), 235
Shalmaneser III, 73, 102
Shalmaneser V, 103–104
Shamash, 42, 43
Shamashumukin, 213
Shechem, 70, 116
Shemaiah, 36
Sheol, 53, 97, 182, 191–192, 228

Shiloh, 19, 36, 253
Shishak, 71, 134
Shittim, 149–150
Shubna (Shebna), 176
Sin, its nature, 197–198
Skinner, John, quoted, 29–30
So (Sibe), 104
Social reform, 38, 279
Socoh, 137
Sodom, 53, 118
Solomon(ic), 67–70, 71, 137, 156, 170, 246
Steinmann, Jean, quoted, 202
Symbolic acts, 46, 51, 243, 256
Syria(ns): see Aram(eans)
Syro-Ephraimite war, 103, 132, 138, 160, 163, 177, 181–185

Taanach, 68
Tabeel, 138, 183
Tarshish, 68, 135, 170
Taxation, 69, 86, 178
Tekoa, 69, 75
Tell Beit Mirsim, 137, 212
Tell ed-Duweir, 135
Tell el-Far'ah, 74
Tell el-Ful, 66
Tell en-Nasbeh, 135, 212
Teraphim, 112–113
Thomas Aquinas, quoted, 53
Tiglath-pileser III, 100, 103, 138–139
Tirzah, 74
Topheth, 182, 256
Torah, 50, 121–122, 147, 155, 173, 224, 248
Transjordan: see Gilead

Unity of the Bible, 6–7, 291–295
Universalism of the prophets, 96–97, 129, 190
Uriah, 69
Urim and thummim, 31–32
Uzziah (Azariah), 136, 138, 164, 196

Vaux, R. de, quoted, 74

Wealth, prophets' attitude toward, 75, 89–90, 173–174, 250–252
Wen-Amon, 33
Wisdom literature, 166, 251, 281–282, 283
Woollcombe, K. J., quoted, 289–290

Zakir of Hamath, 32
Zarephath, 72
Zeboiim, 128
Zechariah, prophet, 188
Zechariah of Israel, 101
Zedekiah (Mattaniah), 238–239, 258, 261–271
Zedekiah ben Chenaanah, 25, 43, 47
Zephaniah, 191, 221–225, 250
Zerubbabel, 188, 271
Zion (see also Jerusalem), 53, 88, 147, 148, 155, 191
Ziph, 137

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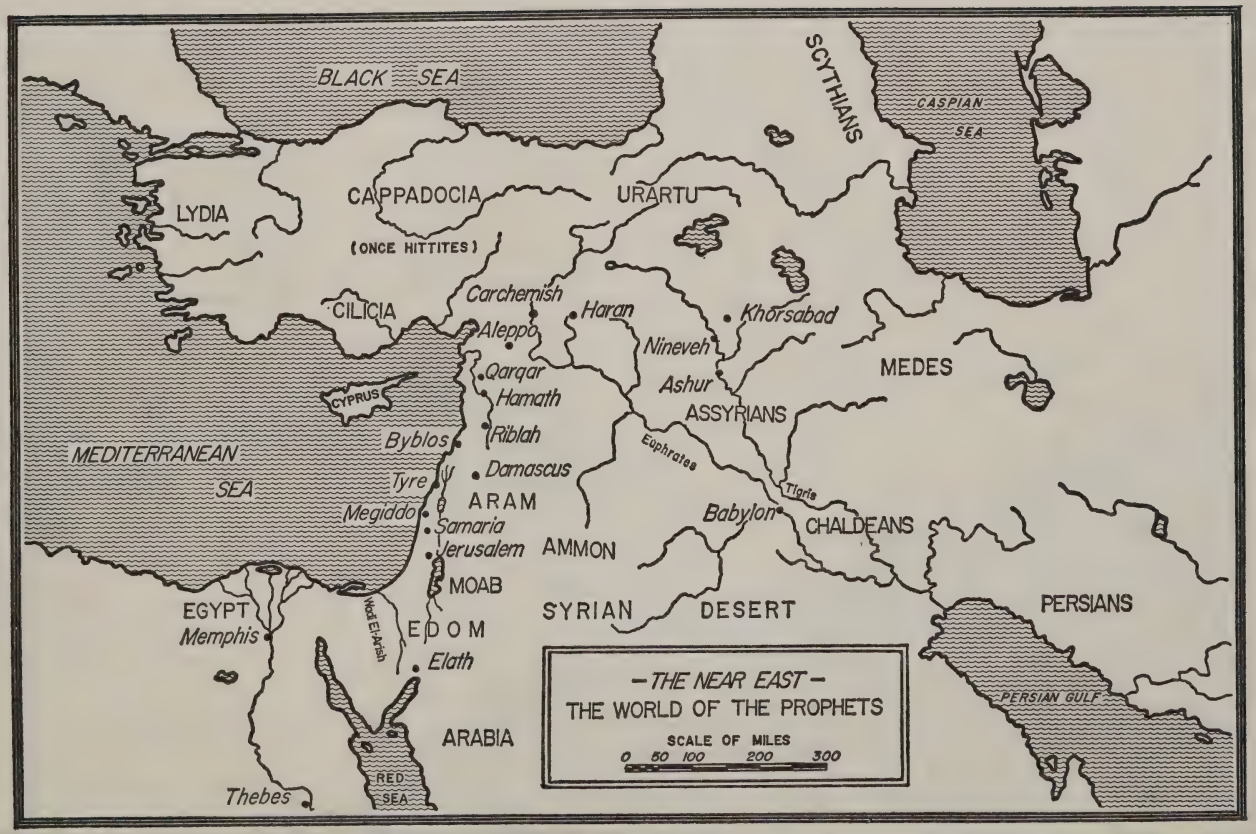
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